

PLUCK AND LUCK

HIS LAST CHANCE

OR UNCLE DICK'S FORTUNE

AND OTHER STORIES

by Allyn Draper



As the stricken man crashed down upon his face, they saw the half-wit dart forward, drag the wolf off the fallen stranger, and hold him off by a heavy collar that the fierce animal wore about his neck.

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By ALLYN DRAPER

CHAPTER I.—The Two Boy Travelers.

"I can't say that I like the looks of the country hereabouts, and I wonder why Uncle Dick came to settle down in this remote neighborhood," said Ralph Dean, in disappointed tones, as he and his cousin, Jack Hardy, came to a halt at the summit of a hill to which the rugged country road which they had been following on foot all the afternoon ascended.

"Of course, I know no more than you do about Uncle Dick's motive in settling in this part of the country," answered Jack Hardy. "But I suppose we need not trouble ourselves about that. The main thing to remember is that our old uncle left us his farm as a legacy, and that according to his will we are not to sell it, but must live on it and work it. We are equal owners and are to share the profits of the place accordingly."

"Profits!" exclaimed Ralph, incredulously. "From the appearance of the few farms in the clearings that we have passed since we left the nearest railway station at midday, I should say the profits are not likely to trouble us much."

"Well, we shall see," said Jack. "Surely, Black Dale, as uncle called his place, cannot be far off now."

"Well, I've rested long enough, and if you are ready, suppose we trudge along. Those black clouds over yonder threaten a thunderstorm, and I hope we may reach Black Dale before it comes," replied Ralph.

Jack assented and each took up a valise which he had carried and began to walk down the hill at a brisk pace. The cousins were of about the same age—about eighteen years—but they did not look at all alike. Jack Hardy was tall for his age and well built. He had clear-cut features and dark eyes and hair. Any one would have called him a good-looking and manly appearing lad. Ralph Dean was shorter and more thick-set, and he had light hair and gray eyes. Until they received notice of the death of their Uncle Dick, otherwise Richard Warren, they had made their home with a distant relative in a little town in Michigan, and now they were on their way to take possession of their inheritance—the farm called Black Dale, as already indicated.

Jack was possessed of a happy disposition, and it was his way to try always to make the best of

things as he found them, and he was ambitious to get along. Ralph had a good deal of energy, and he was always very enthusiastic over every new project, but he lacked perseverance, and to say the truth, he had never been fond of work of any kind. In the country town from which the lads came Ralph was known as a rather reckless, shiftless youth, but nobody could say there was anything really bad about him.

"I begin to feel quite like a landed proprietor—a country gentleman, you know," said he, as they walked along. "We'll pitch in and work hard and make our farm pay. We'll buy more land as we can afford it and become rich farmers yet."

Jack smiled as he assented. But he knew Ralph so well that he was afraid his enthusiasm would not last. While they continued to walk fast, as the clouds darkened above their heads and the rumbling sound of distant thunder told of the approach of the storm, silence fell between them and each was occupied with his own thoughts. Probably curiosity concerning their inheritance was dominant in their minds. But suddenly they were startled from their reflections, whatever they may have been, by a loud clap of thunder preceded by a vivid flash of lightning, and then the rain began to fall. Looking forward eagerly for some place of shelter, Jack saw a long, low, weather-beaten house a little further on. The building stood close by the roadside, and there was no fence to shut it in from the highway. Hung in a frame at the top of a post in front of the house was an old-fashioned "tavern sign."

"Hello!" cried Jack. "Yonder is an inn! We are in luck! Come along, let's get under cover before we are wet through!"

He broke into a run as he spoke, and Ralph followed. In that fashion they raced up to the lonely inn and they saw as they drew near to it that the old sign that creaked as it swung in the wind bore this inscription in faded letters:

"The Dog and Gun. By Isaac Krugg."

A dilapidated porch ran along the entire front of the old hostelry, and the two young travelers hastened under it. As their footsteps sounded on the rickety boards a door opened and a burly, thick-set, red-faced man, with a closely cropped gray beard and bristling mustache, appeared.

Over one eye—his left—he wore a black leather patch, but the other eye, a small, keen, gray orb, was fixed upon the two lads with a look of curious scrutiny.

"Strangers, eh?" said he, taking a short, black pipe from between his teeth. "Strangers an' travelers, I make bold to say, seein' yer travelin'-bags. If so be, to the 'Dog and Gun' I bid ye welcome. Come inside. You'll find the old inn mighty comfortable an' Isaac Krugg entirely at yer service."

"We're goin' to have a heavy storm; it's set in to make a night of it. It's about six now, an' so I suppose, young gents, you'll have supper an' a bed for the night," said the landlord, as he followed the boys.

"We'll have supper, certainly, but as we are bound for Black Dale farm, if it's not too far off, we'll push on there to-night," replied Jack.

The landlord gave a quick start as the lad mentioned the name of his Uncle Dick's farm, and his single eye opened very wide as he stared at his young guests.

"You ain't them, be you? You ain't them two boys what old Sheath, the caretaker o' Black Dale farm, was tellin' me was left the farm?" he exclaimed.

"We are Richard Warren's nephews, and it is true that he left his farm to us," replied Jack, smilingly.

"Well, I want to know. And two likely young chaps you are, too," said Mr. Krugg, who looked the lads over in an admiring manner.

"I say, landlord, why is it that you and every one else we have met in this neighborhood acts so queerly when we mention the name of Uncle Dick's farm?" Ralph asked, frankly.

"Good gracious, don't you know?" exclaimed Mr. Krugg, in evident surprise. "Didn't yer uncle never tell yer nothing?"

Ralph shook his head.

"Well, that's queer—well, the fact is, they say Captain Midnight's ghost haunts Black Dale farm," the landlord continued.

"Which statement does not enlighten us much. Who was Captain Midnight, and why does his ghost make Black Dale his special haunt? I should think any right-minded ghost would seek a more lively neighborhood," said Jack, lightly.

"'Tain't no laughin' matter, young gent, an' fer my part I wouldn't take Black Dale as a gift, an' that's what. Who was Captain Midnight, says you? Captain Midnight was a bloody train robber, says I, an' he owned Black Dale afore yer uncle got it, an' he was murdered there—found dead in the old house with a pistol bullet in his heart. Who done it or why, I can't say, and it never came out who an' what Captain Midnight was until after his death. We all hereabouts thought he was an honest chap, by the name o' Scott. There were some suspicious-actin' men seen lurkin' round the farm afore Scott, or Midnight, was done for, an' I suspect they killed him on account o' thinkin' he had money hid, for the old house was all tore up, showing how they'd ransacked it from cellar to garret."

"Oh, it that all? Well, I am relieved. If we have nothing more material than a ghost to fear it's all right. By the way, landlord, have you seen anything of Sneath, the caretaker of Black Dale, to-day? We sent him word that we were coming

and rather expected him to meet us at the railway station," said Ralph.

"No, I hain't seen the old man to-day," answered the innkeeper, and as he thus made reply became aware of a faint but insistent tapping on a door at the rear of the public room.

"I've got to step out for a moment to see about supper," added the landlord, suddenly flashing a covert glance at the rear door, and evidently hearing the faint tapping.

"But you didn't say how far it is to Black Dale," said Jack, quickly.

"A matter of six miles or thereabouts," replied Krugg, as he crossed to the rear portal.

As the door closed behind him, though he saw no one beyond it, Jack fancied he heard a new voice hoarsely mutter some impatient words. A glance at Ralph told him he, too, had caught that sound, and he whispered:

"Now, I wonder why Krugg was called out in that secret, stealthy way? I don't like the looks of it and I'm for pushing on to Black Dale as soon as we've had something to eat."

"I agree with you perfectly, Jack. But it's not a pleasant prospect to look forward to living in a haunted house—a place that has an evil reputation for miles around."

That's so. But, of course, we have got to make the best of it. And as we don't believe in ghosts, or any such nonsense, we ought not to let the landlord's story trouble us," said Jack, and in a whisper he added:

"You cross to the window and keep talking. Say anything you like."

"Why, I——" began Ralph, and then as he saw Jack stealing toward the door at the rear of the apartment he understood what he meant and, walking heavily across the room, he reached the window and began to talk about the weather, while Jack put his ear to the door and listened. Watching him, Ralph saw him start as if he had overheard something unexpected and then seem to listen with absorbed interest.

In a few moments Jack stole away from the door and, noiselessly crossing the floor, joined his cousin at the window.

"Well, what did you overhear? You acted as if you heard something," said Ralph, in a low voice.

"I heard a man speaking with the landlord. Their voices were scarcely above a whisper, but I heard the man whom we have not seen say, 'The youngsters are bright-looking chaps, and likely to make difficulties for us at Black Dale. I'm afraid we shall have to get rid of them in some way.' Then the landlord answered, 'I won't have anything to do with that sort of work. Bagger.' The other replied, fiercely, 'You fool, I don't mean what you think—at least, not now. It's my idea to get rid of them all fair and square, if they are reasonable. If not it's their lookout.' That's all I heard. They went out of the next room then," said Jack.

CHAPTER II.—At the "Dog and Gun."

Before Ralph could make any comment upon what Jack had told him the landlord re-entered the public room.

"Supper will be ready for you soon, gents," said he, with an attempt to seem genial, and quite

at his ease, but the lads saw that such was far from being his real state of mind.

"We seem to be your only guests just now," said Ralph, with a meaning glance at Jack.

"Why, sartin, in course. Hain't had no one stoppin' yere fer more than a week. Me an' the ole woman and my niece git mighty tired waitin' fer strangers, an' that's a fact. Why, there hasn't a soul, 'ceptin' you an' us three what lives here, set foot in the house all day. Uncommon dull, it are, an' that's a fact."

Presently the rear door opened once more and in it appeared a young girl whose age was apparently about sixteen or seventeen. She was dressed in a neat calico gown and spotless white apron, and her graceful, girlish figure and sweetly pretty face made her a most agreeable object for the eye to dwell upon.

"This is Mattie, my niece, Mattie Meredith, gents. My gal, these here are the young gents what's fell heir ter Black Dale," said Krugg, and the girl bowed gracefully, blushed a bit and looked shyly at the two lads.

"Ralph Dean and Jack Hardy, at your service, miss. The latter being myself," said Jack.

The landlord's pretty niece smiled and bowed again as she said:

"I came to say that supper is ready."

"All right. This way, gents. Step right out. You won't find no fancy eatin' at the 'Dog and Gun'; jist good and plenty o' plain food. Good an' plenty an' plain, an' what more kin a healthy gent want?" remarked the landlord, ushering the lads into the next room.

Having seen them seated at the dining-table ne withdrew, leaving Mattie to serve them. She moved about softly, and gracefully placed the plain, substantial food, whose praises Krugg had sung, before them. Plain the meal certainly was. Whether good or not Jack hardly knew. Suffice to say, pretty Mattie was attractive enough to make any youth forget what the food with which she served him was like. At length she paused at Jack's elbow and said, in a whisper:

"I am sorry you are going to live at Black Dale, because I am afraid you will be in danger. Don't answer out loud, for I don't want Uncle Isaac to know that I said anything to you about Black Dale."

"In danger, eh? Why do you think danger awaits us there?" Jack answered, in a whisper, while his eyes searched the sweet face of the maid of the inn.

"I don't know. I can only suspect. There are two strange men here whose presence at the inn uncle seeks to keep a secret from everyone. I have overheard them talking about Black Dale," she replied.

"Tell me what they said, please," he asked.

She hesitated and glanced toward a window which was screened by a half curtain. Instantly Jack caught the sound of footsteps without. Mattie put her finger to her lips and glided swiftly across the room and drew the curtain aside. Then, through the glass, Jack saw a tall, stoop-shouldered man going toward the stable. He saw that the man was clad in black and that he wore a wide, soft black hat, but only obtained a rear view—did not see his face. Mattie dropped the curtain and came back to the table.

"That man is one of the strangers. Uncle Isaac calls him Mr. Bagger. The other he calls Mr.

Hanson. I am sure they are in hiding here for some evil purpose, which concerns Black Dale, but I don't know what it is."

Leaving the table, for by this time they had pretty well satisfied their appetites, the two lads passed out into the public room. There they saw a tall, lean old man, clad in the rough garb of a countryman, and the landlord hastened to say, jerking his stump hand at the new arrival, who stood looking at the boys with a pair of singularly keen black eyes, set beneath bushy, overhanging gray brows:

"This here are Mr. Sneath, young gents. 'Old Sneath,' we call him familiar an' friendly like, you know."

The boys shook hands with the old fellow, observing that he wore a full, bushy beard that was well frosted with the white of age.

"So you are Jack and you are Ralph, eh? Glad to know you, lads; right glad, indeed, and mighty sorry I didn't git to the depot fer you. The fact is, old Dobbin, yer uncle's hoss, strayed outen the field, an' I didn't find him in time," said Sneath, in kindly tones.

"That's all right. We have fared very well, indeed, here at the hands of our worthy landlord. It isn't raining very hard just now, so I think we had better get on to Glack Dale," answered Jack.

Sneath assented, and presently the trio were in a covered spring wagon and old Sneath was urging a stout farm horse that drew the vehicle away in the direction of the lads' heretofore of them unknown inheritance. The rain pattered upon the roof of the wagon and old Sneath devoted himself to the horse. It was rather an oppressive silence that fell between the trio and, to say the truth, the boys began to feel a little melancholy. Once in a while they exchanged low-voiced remarks, and at length old Sneath turned into a shaded lane and presently, in the fading light of the spring day they saw an old, rambling, somewhat dilapidated wooden house standing in the midst of neglected grounds, in which there grew a number of tall hemlocks and spruce pine trees. Beyond they observed the outbuildings and they had decided that they were at Black Dale even before old Sneath pulled up beside the unattractive dwelling and announced cheerfully:

"Well, here we are at Black Dale at last. 'Tain't so mournful-looking in bright sunlight, an' you'll like it better in the morning."

The last comment was eviently called forth by his observance of an expression of disappointment and down-heartedness which was plainly visible in the young faces beside him.

"Hello, Job!" he called, as the boys sprang to the ground. Directly a huge, shambling figure came out of the shadows of a little porch beside the door, and the new arrivals saw that while the personage called Job had the form of a huge man, his face was that of a boy. He had long, yellow hair and great, vacant blue eyes and indeed looked like a man with the face of a child. Job laughed in a strange eerie way that somewhat made the lads feel uncomfortable, and as he shamled off, leading the horse toward the stable, they heard him mutter:

"So they have come. I hope they'll drive away the shadows that are always creepin' and crawlin' about o' nights. I feel 'em near now."

CHAPTER III.—The "Shadows" of Black Dale.

The room into which old Sneath led the boys was enveloped in semi-gloom, but presently a match flashed among the shadows and the light of a lamp which old Sneath set the flame to, flickered up and they were able to survey the surroundings. The apartment was of medium size and scantily furnished. As soon as the lamp-light fairly illuminated it, old Sneath pointed at a crayon portrait of a middle-aged man that hung above the mantel, and said, in what struck the boys as being a strangely anxious tone:

"I suppose you don't know that picture, seeing as how I believe you never saw your Uncle Richard in life."

"No, we never saw Uncle Richard. Is that his portrait?" replied Jack, looking at the pictured face.

"Yes. That's him," answered Sneath, watching the faces of the two lads covertly.

"Well," said Ralph, "I must say Uncle Richard hasn't the slightest resemblance to any of the other members of the Warren family."

"No, I've heard him say that. But now sit down and make yourselves at home. In the morning I'll show you all over the house and farm, an' I'm obliged to say neither are much to brag of. By the way, at the start I want to tell you how I happened to be in charge here with Job. You see, when your uncle took sick here he had only Job with him. Job was here when yer uncle bought the place and he didn't want to leave. Job are a poor, half-witted boy, with the strength of a giant an' the mind of a child. He was here with Captain Midnight—that's all any one knows about him. Well, seeing he was going to be sick your uncle packed off to a hospital in a distant town and left Job here alone. When, at the hospital, he got worse he sent for me. We were old friends, you must know, and knowing I was pretty well down in the world he sent me here to look after the place. Afore he died he wrote me, asking me to stay right on here with you and help you run the farm, and I want to ask you to let poor Job stay, too." Old Sneath paused, and Jack said:

"Certainly, we shall be glad to have you and Job stay with us."

"That is, if we can afford it," put in Ralph. "You see, Mr. Sneath, we haven't any money to speak of and we have got to make our living off the farm. I'm afraid you and Job will have to wait a long time for your wages."

"That's all right. All Job an' me asks is our grub an' the shelter of the house. There are six cows an' a lot of poultry on the farm. We have started a vegetable garden an' put in a crop of corn, oats and rye. We shall have enough to eat, and the horse, old Dobbin and his mate, are a good enough team to work the place an' draw the produce to market in the town, twelve miles north."

"Farming is slavish work, anyway, and I'm not used to it. I'm afraid I can't stand it very long. I don't see why Uncle Dick didn't keep his money and leave us that instead of this old farm. They say he was rich once out in California. Why couldn't he have held on to his wealth. Then he might have left us something

worth while," remarked Ralph, in a discontented, fault-finding tone.

"Quite right, you are, young sir. Certainly your uncle ought to have kept his money for you. It was foolish for him to think young chaps like you would want to work his old farm. Very right you are."

"And then the place has a bad name. The landlord told us about Captain Midnight, the train robber, who lived here under a false name, and who was mysteriously murdered in this house. Mr. Krugg says the place is haunted by the ghost of Captain Midnight. It's enough to sink one's spirits down to his boots to think of living in such a place," said Ralph.

"Oh, the ghost story ain't true, though it's a fact that Captain Midnight lived here alone with Job, and that the former was murdered here. There was and is a mystery about that time. And Job knows nothing about it, he claims. He was away the night Midnight was killed, he says. Don't worry about that matter. Only take hold like men and try to make the best of all your uncle had to leave you and maybe things will turn out better than you think," answered Sneath.

Just then Job entered the room and, coming up to Jack, stood still and stared into his face, with his great vacant eyes for a full minute. Then he put out his hand, saying:

"Job will like you."

Then Job went and stood before Ralph, subjecting him to the same fixed, blank stare.

"Your eyes ain't quite true. I don't know about you," he said, turning away.

Ralph flushed, but he forced a laugh and said, in a voice that was not very pleasant:

"I hope you'll like me when we get better acquainted."

"Maybe," answered Job, doubtfully. "Ha!" he exclaimed, abruptly, cocking his head on one side and seeming to listen. "They are around again—the shadows—they have been coming every night of late. Oh, it's like when Captain Midnight was alive."

Old Sneath got upon his feet and put his hand upon the shoulder of the giant boy softly.

"Don't mind them, Job. It's only the moaning of the wind. Come, you'd better go to bed; that's a good lad."

As if he spoke unconsciously, the boys heard old Sneath mutter:

"If they do come they'll find Job ready for 'em, I'll swear!"

But the old man gently led the excited youth, who offered no resistance, out of the room, and when he presently came back alone, he said:

"I suppose you're tired with your long journey, and so I'll show you to yer room, if you please."

The lads assented and they presently found themselves in a comfortable chamber that was provided with two neat cot beds. Sneath put down the lamp, bade them good-night and then withdrew. His heavy footsteps had died away along the passage when Jack said:

"There surely is a mystery here, and old Sneath knows there is something in Job's fears of what he calls the shadows."

"Yes," assented Ralph. "I wonder if we ought to tell the old man of the warning pretty Mattie Meredith gave us—acquaint him with the news that two strange men are in hiding at the

inn and that they meditate some evil project concerning Black Dale, she suspects."

"We must not risk getting the girl into trouble. The landlord and Sneath seemed very friendly. The latter might tell Krugg. We'll wait until we make Sneath's acquaintance better before we tell him of the two strangers," replied Jack.

The lads talked for some little time, but finally both laid down without undressing, oppressed by a vague sense of danger. Ere long, despite the undefined apprehension in their minds, they fell asleep. The storm continued and in a little room on the ground floor, which was his sleeping chamber, Job sat on his couch, alone in the darkness, save for an animal that crouched at his feet. This creature was not a dog, but it somewhat resembled one. In his hand Job clutched a great knife and kept his lonely vigil, always listening intently, and the fierce eyes of his animal companion gleamed up at him through the darkness, And so the hours wore on, and while Jack and Ralph slept, the strange lad never once closed his eyes.

The hour of midnight had come and passed when the two lads were suddenly awakened at the same time by a terrible cry of human agony which echoed through the silent house. They sprang up and immediately heard some one in the passage. A rap sounded on the door and a voice said, hoarsely:

"It's Sneath. For heaven's sake let me in, lads!"

Jack sprang across the room and opened the portal. Instantly a blinding light flashed in his eyes and two men, closely masked, dashed into the room. One carried a dark-lantern and both held revolvers in their hands. Those weapons were pointed at the two boys and one of the intruders said sternly:

"We're going to bind and gag you and if you make any fuss about it we'll do for you offhand. We're desperate and we won't stand any nonsense, I warn you!"

CHAPTER IV.—Desperate Men at Black Dale.

"What do you mean to do here?" Jack found voice to demand as he and Ralph started back before the presented weapons in the hands of the two strangers with hidden faces.

"Never you mind. Shut up, now, and take it easy. And thank your lucky stars that as yet you are strangers to the secrets of Black Dale," replied one of the men.

And Jack, whose wits were beginning to become somewhat collected, observed that the speaker was tall and clad in black. In fact, the lad jumped to the almost positive conclusion that he was the man of whom he had obtained a rear view as he glanced through the window from which Mattie Meredeth had drawn the curtain at the inn.

Realizing the evident futility, not to say danger, of attempting any resistance, the lads permitted themselves to be bound and gagged by the strangers.

When they had fettered the hands and feet of the lads and secured the gags between their jaws, the two men regarded them attentively for a moment as they lay helpless upon the floor, and, of course, wholly unable to utter a sound, much less make any outcry for assistance.

"I'm sorry you young chaps came here, and as there's no use scaring you needless, since you know nothing about the—I mean as you haven't taken sides against us yet, we don't mean to harm you; just merely keep you quiet, that's all. But if you value your lives you'll just quit Black Dale in the morning and never come back. There's danger here and you can't stay long without being in peril of your lives," said the man whom Jack took to be the personage of whom he had obtained a glimpse at the inn, and whom Mattie called Bagger.

With that, the speaker took up the lantern which he had placed upon the floor and strode from the room, followed by his companion, who was a small, wiry-looking man, clad in worn garments. The door closed behind the two men and the boys, whose first night at this new home was one of unpleasant and perilous incident, were left to their reflections alone and helpless in the darkness.

Though they were unable to speak, their minds were active, and as he seemed to hear the terrible cry which suddenly awakened him still echoing through the lone house of evil repute, Jack experienced the fear that some terrible deed of violence had once more been committed under that ill-omened roof.

What have those men come here for?" Jack asked himself, but his mind suggested no satisfactory answer to the question.

He thought that old Sneath must know, and he mentally resolved to ask the old man for an explanation at the earliest opportunity, if he had not been slain. It was his opinion that Job would have a good fight below stairs when the intruders gained an entrance theré, and he could not understand why he had heard nothing to indicate that the half-witted giant offered any resistance. The truth regarding the entrance of the two men to the house was this: They had noiselessly pried open a window of the kitchen and entered that room first, as subsequent investigation showed the lads. Then they stole to Job's room, with weapons drawn and acting as if they were previously informed that the chamber was occupied. But although Job had been on watch in that room a little earlier, when the strangers opened the door he was not there. The giant boy and his animal companion had vanished. A few moments later the two men surprised old Sneath in his chamber. He sprang from his couch and made for his revolver, which lay on a stand a few feet away. But before he could reach it the strangers were upon him, beating him over the head with their clubbed weapons. Then, just before he fell to the floor, stricken senseless, he uttered the cry that awakened the sleeping boys. Having bound the old man, the strangers hastened up to the lads' room with scarcely a moment's delay. As they descended the stairs, after securing Jack and his cousin, the tall man in somber garb said to his companion:

"What troubles me most just now is to make out what's become of Job, the half-wit. That strange boy is mighty cunning, for all that he's off in the upper story. He is dangerous, too, for he's powerful, and that queer pet of his is a fierce creature, perfectly devoted to his master."

"Job used to wander about o' nights in Cap-

tain Midnight's time. Maybe he's gone off somewhere with his wolf, not knowing that we were around. That's my idea, anyhow, Bagger," answered the man addressed.

"Job never roamed about at night while Captain Midnight was here when it was not moonlight. I'm afraid he's up to some cunning plan against us. I shouldn't like to tackle him alone, Hanson. We must be on the alert for him."

"Yes, for him and the wolf. The pair could make a hard fight. With the big knife he carries and the wolf's teeth and claws we might have our hands full."

"And we don't want to shoot Job down."

"Certainly not, Bagger, for you know we have always strongly believed he knows the secret, since he lived here with Midnight, who trusted him as he did no one else."

"That's so. But here we are at old Sneath's room. We've determined to-night to make a final test to find out whether he knows the secret or not. I think he has discovered it."

They had paused at the door of Sneath's room as the last words were spoken, and Bagger immediately swung the portal open. They passed in and saw Sneath upon the floor just as they had left him. But the old man had regained his senses, and as Bagger flashed the light of his dark-lantern upon him he turned a drawn and frightened face to the strangers.

"Old man," said Bagger, in threatening tones, "you know well enough what we are here for, and we're going to have it out with you to-night. We are going to make you tell the secret of Black Dale—Captain Midnight's secret, which you got from Job, the half-wit. No lies will go down with us, understand that to begin with."

CHAPTER V.—Job Outwits the "Shadows."

While Jack and Ralph remained helpless, and some little time after failure to release themselves, despite the desperate efforts they had put forth to that end, convinced them that they were merely wasting strength, they suddenly became aware of a sound at the window. In a moment the sash was raised without noise and soft footsteps came across the floor toward them. In the darkness they could not see the person who had stealthily entered through the window, but in a moment he was at Jack's side, and the voice of Job whispered:

"I'll set you free. Job has outwitted the shadows."

He made use of his great knife to such good purpose that Jack was soon liberated from the cords that had secured his hands and feet and the gag was removed from his mouth.

As Jack got upon his feet the strange, demented lad glided to Ralph and quickly performed a like service for him. The freed boys were delighted at this unanticipated turn of events in their favor, of course, and they wondered how Job had managed to elude the men who had broken into the house and how he happened to come to their rescue. The explanation was not then made by their deliverer, but the fact of the matter was that as he maintained his solitary vigil that night Job heard the men who had come to Black Dale stealthily prowling about the house. His sense of hearing was amazingly keen and he was as-

sisted in the discovery of the presence of the strangers without by the scent or instinct of his animal companion, which was really a huge black wolf.

The wolf manifested certain signs of uneasiness that the lad comprehended.

"Ah!" he muttered, under his breath, "the shadows are about again. Nick hears 'em. Quiet, boys, and you and I will track the shadows. If they go to Job's house of gold he'll fall upon them with his knife and you'll help, Nick; you'll help Job. They shall not take away the shining yellow beauties. No! no! Not until they kill us, eh, Nick? Not until they kill us! Job will never tell of the house of gold—never let any one take away the shining beauties that are heaped there. If he did, Captain Midnight's ghost would strangle poor Job while he slept. The captain swore it, swore it with awful oaths, and then, too, Job loves the yellow beauties of his house of gold. Come, Nick, now, through the window we go, silent and still."

With this strange and mysterious monologue the demented boy softly opened and crept through the window, followed in equal silence by his dumb companion, with whom he seemed to have established a remarkable understanding.

Alighting outside the window, Job crouched down in the darkness with the tame wolf and listened. He heard the men at work at the kitchen window and then, as his eyes became accustomed to peering through the night, he made out their shadowy forms.

"Two of the shadows there. Are there more? Job feels the presence of others. Are they on the way to the place of the shining yellow beauties that make Job—poor Job—feel he is a king, for with them he can buy the whole world when he wants to," he pondered.

Then he glided away with the wolf at his heels and made a circle around the house. The result was that he discovered that the two men at the kitchen door were not alone. Stationed, one on each side of the house, he discovered four men.

"Ah, the shadows are thick to-night. There are more than Job has ever seen about before. Two have followed him many a time, but he pretended not to see," he said to himself.

"They thought Job was a fool. They thought he would lead them to the bright, yellow beauties, but he didn't." He chuckled at the memory of his own shrewdness, and then suddenly moved swiftly away toward the north.

He was not gone long, and when he returned he carried a short ladder. Avoiding the sentinel who guarded the side of the house to which he approached, he placed the ladder against the wall and, leaving the wolf at the foot of it, ascended and entered the chamber occupied by the two boy heroes of Black Dale as recounted. A light in old Sneath's room had given Job the information that the housebreakers were there, and as soon as he had severed the cords that bound Jack and Ralph, as we have seen, he whispered:

"Job knows bad men in old Sneath's room. Maybe they mean to hurt him. You will help Job drive them out. Four more men outside. Oh, Job thinks we shall have a big fight."

"Of course we'll help old Sneath. But if what you say is true the house is besieged. With two men inside and four outside that makes six in all

against us. Pretty big odds, Job. Have you any firearms in the house?" asked Jack.

"Yes, guns and pistols. Old Sneath brought 'em here when he came back. He! he! he! Old Sneath thought he could fool Job, but he couldn't and so he gave it up. But Job promised the old man he'd never tell, and he won't."

"Come along, Walk still, like the shadows," whispered Job, as he softly strode out of the room.

The boys followed. He led them below, by the way of a rear flight, of which the housebreakers had not availed themselves, and so they came into a small apartment, evidently used as a store-room. Job drew a heavy curtain across the single window and then lighted a candle, which he found on a shelf under which stood a closed chest. This the strange lad opened and handed out three rifles and a pair of six-shooters. All the weapons were fully loaded, as the lads quickly assured themselves, and they were gratified that the rifles were repeating Remingtons.

"Quite an arsenal!" said Jack, as he put one of the revolvers in his pocket and took one of the rifles in his hands.

Job took the other revolver and handed a rifle to Ralph. Then, with the revolver in one hand and a gun in the other the demented lad led the way out of the store room. The others followed. The room which they entered was the kitchen. Job put out the candle and shot an extra bolt on the outer door of that room and noiselessly closed the window, which the intruders had left open.

"Now for old Sneath's room," he whispered, when this was done.

"Job, we must surprise the men who are in Sneath's room," whispered Jack, as they stealthily approached the door of that apartment.

CHAPTER VI.—The Old Caretaker's Ruse.

The door was closed, but Job noiselessly opened it on a crack and, peering in, he and his two companions saw Sneath and the men who had made the old man a prisoner. There was a small fire-place in one side of the room. In this the strangers had found fuel ready to be ignited, and now, when the lads stealthily looked into the room they saw that the fire was burning brightly. Upon the floor, before the fire-place, lay the old caretaker still bound hand and foot. The man whose identity as the one whom he had seen outside the inn Jack had decided upon was standing upon the hearth engaged in the suggestive occupation of heating an iron poker in the glowing fire. Old Sneath had leaped from his bed, clad only in a night-robe, and his bare feet, with heavy cords bound about the ankles, were turned to the fire. The old caretaker's eyes evinced horror as he watched the iron in the fire as it gradually grew hotter and hotter and its grimy darkness commenced to glow red among the blazing coals.

"I tell ye I don't know the secret. I tell ye if Job knows it he has never given me even a hint. Stop and think of the matter, you devils. If I knew where the great treasure was hidden do you suppose I would let it alone and not profit by it? No! no! Naturally, now, wouldn't I have taken it and made off long ago? Do you suppose for a moment that I would remain here when I had a great fortune at my command? No! no! Judge for

yourselves if I wouldn't go to some fine city and procure all the luxuries and pleasures that such wealth could buy instead of remaining here," said Sneath.

Bagger turned the iron in the fire again as he said, sullenly:

"We're goin' to test yer truth. What you say sounds reasonable enough, but it's an easy matter to talk like that. You'll sing a different song when you feel the red-hot iron eating into the soles of your feet. There is a bare possibility that you don't know, I admit. But I'm certain that, even if you haven't found out the secret, you are here trying to discover it, and so you are opposed to us—the men who have the best right to the gold—all said and done."

As Bagger and his comrade turned their backs to the door, Jack whispered in Job's ear. The demented lad nodded approvingly as he whispered back:

"Yes, that's it! We'll push the door wide open and level our guns at the bad men and make them go or shoot them."

He was about to fling wide the door when, as Sneath began to speak again, Jack laid a restraining hand upon his arm and whispered:

"Wait a moment."

Job dropped his hand from the door-knob and the caretaker said, with seeming reluctance and like one who spoke against his will:

"I weaken. I can't stand red-hot iron. Promise me that I shall not be harmed when you've got it and I'll show you where the treasure is hidden. Job told me. I meant to get away with it all ere long."

"Good! Now you're beginning to be reasonable."

"Release me and let me get into my clothes and I'll guide you to Captain Midnight's gold cache at once," continued Sneath.

"All right," assented Bagger, and in a moment the caretaker was free from the cords with which he had been secured and he got upon his feet and began to dress rapidly.

"I believe Job is right—that the old man is trying a ruse and that he means to give the villains the slip," Jack breathed in Ralph's ear.

The other nodded assent and at a signal from Job all three stole away from the door and went silently through a portal opposite it. Through the crack of that door they looked and presently saw Bagger and his comrade march Sneath out between them. They conducted the caretaker out of the house through the side door, by which the lads had entered upon their arrival at the house. In a moment the trio of Sneath's friends followed and they stole after him and his captors as he led them through the darkness in the same direction that Job had taken when he stole away from the house before he released Jack and Ralph. Then suddenly an object which the new arrivals at Black Dale took to be a dog brushed by them and began leaping around Job, uttering loud whines of delight.

"It's only Nick. Nick is my tame wolf, that I caught when he was like a little kitten. He's a big wolf now, but just like a dog. Nick is savage, though, when I want him to be."

"You go on after the old man. The night voices are telling Job something. You can't hear them, but he can. They never tell Job wrong. He will

do what they say and help old Sneath if he needs him."

Then, followed by his tame wolf, the demented boy glided away into the darkness in a course at right angles to that which the caretaker and his escort were following.

"What mad freak has taken hold of him now, I wonder?" whispered Ralph, impatiently.

"No matter. Our duty is plainly indicated," replied Jack, in like tones. "We must continue to follow Sneath and be ready to assist him when he makes a dash to escape, as I think he will do presently."

But Sneath strode onward in a straight course and he had not as yet made any attempt to break away from his escort when, as the two lads were still following him, while the rain ceased and the night grew steadily brighter, a man suddenly stepped out from behind a tree, leveling a rifle at them, and they saw that he was about to shout an alarm to Bagger and his comrade.

CHAPTER VII.—A Night Chase at the Black Dale.

Meanwhile, Job had not proceeded far in the course which he had taken when he glided away from Jack and his cousin, when he abruptly changed the direction of his advance and proceeded in precisely the same course that Sneath was taking, in his rear, which was the way Job had gone when he previously left the house, as if to assure himself of the safety of his "yellow beauties" in "the house of gold." The half-wit had a confirmed habit of muttering his thoughts and he was apparently unconscious of the utterance when he began to talk to himself in whispers as he took the new direction. Presently Job stopped and, dropping upon the earth, while the tame wolf licked his face like an affectionate dog, he listened eagerly, attentively.

He got upon his feet in a moment, muttering:

"Good! Old Sneath is going away from the yellow beauties now. I can hear his footsteps. The night voices were wrong for once. No, he does not know where the house of gold is. He is fooling the shadows, as Job thought at first."

Then, as almost at the same instant he discovered the man who stepped out from behind the tree before the two lads, he put his hand on the wolf's head, pointed at the stranger and whispered:

"Take him, Nick! Down with him, boy!"

The well-brken beast darted over the thick, soft turf like a flying shade of the night, then made a tremendous leap, and alighted on the stranger's back, hurling him to the earth with such force that the breath was well-nigh knocked out of his body, stifling the cry that had arisen to his lips before he could utter it. Job then picked up the fellow's gun, and as he sat up looking dazed and confused, the strange lad said to him:

"Keep still. Here, Nick, watch him. If he moves or speaks, kill him! Watch, boy! Watch!"

But just then, when it seemed that Job was about to leave the wolf to guard the confederate of Bagger and Hanson, an enraged shout pealed out in the voice of the former, and old Sneath, who had at that moment broken away from his captors, came rushing toward his boy friends. But he was pursued by the two desperate men, who shouted at him, threatening to shoot if he did not

halt. The old caretaker was vigorous and active, despite his years, and he reached Jack and his companions while his pursuers were yet at a little distance in the rear. The shouts uttered by the latter were answered by voices that emanated from the direction of the house, and it was evident to the lads that, even if they wished to seek shelter there they could not do so.

"Confederates of the villains who are after you are about the house and we cannot go there," said Jack, as Sneath came up, panting with violent exertion, but evidently surprised and delighted at meeting friends.

"Follow Job and he'll hide you where the shadows can't find you!" cried the half-wit.

Then, to the wolf:

"Come, Nick. It's no good to watch him now."

With that, as the wolf bounded after him, the lad raced away and they had some difficulty in keeping pace with him. Shouting to call the men from the house to join in the chase, Bagger and Hanson pursued the fugitives. Soon Job was leading them along the edge of a deep pond, whose banks were overgrown by drooping willows. Laughing to himself, the boy giant presently signaled his comrades to go straight on. They did so, for there was no time to ask the lad for an explanation of what he meditated. On came Bagger and Hanson and from their rear emanated sounds that indicated the men who had been stationed about the house were coming after them. Looking back, Jack and Ralph saw Job suddenly spring up out of the shelter of the willows as Bagger passed and, seizing the ruffian, the boyish giant hurled him headlong over the bank into the water.

As Hanson stopped to help his confederate out of the pond, Sneath and his companions immediately distanced them, and presently Job led them into a dense woods, whose confines they reached a few moments later. Job then proceeded in advance of the others, as if he had in mind some definite destination. At no great distance further on they came out into a clearing of small extent in which there was a rude log cabin and an open shed. A great litter of chips and shavings before the shed told where the preceding winter the lumbermen had labored making shingles and chopping ties, to be used on the railway, miles distant. After they entered the abandoned dwelling, when half an hour had elapsed and nothing occurred to indicate the approach of their pursuers, they began to hope that they had seen the last of them, at least, for the night. Jack and Ralph were now consumed with curiosity to hear the full explanation of the cause of the stirring events of the night. Presently old Sneath remarked:

"We have left the old house at Black Dale at the mercy of the robbers, but I don't think they'll destroy it—burn it, you know, for they cannot be certain that the treasure is not hidden somewhere in it."

"Oh!" said Jack, "now you are coming to what I want to ask you about—so there really is a treasure hidden at Black Dale farm, eh?"

"That's what the rascals seem sure of," replied Sneath.

"I wish you would tell us all about it. As the farm belongs to us now and we are likely to have further trouble with the lawless men who are seeking for the treasure, I think we ought to have

all the information you can give us," continued Jack.

"We must find the treasure. It will make us rich. We'll dig the whole place over if necessary," said Ralph.

CHAPTER VIII.—Sneath's Story of the Old Miner.

Ralph's eyes gleamed with the light of cupidity, and it seemed that the passion of avarice was aroused in his heart. Old Sneath regarded him with a searching look, in which Jack thought he could discern disapproval and something of disappointment. While they still heard the regular footsteps of Job outside the door, where the demented lad yet maintained his self-appointed guard, and the rising of wind which had increased in violence since the subsidence of the rain, swept through the woods and around the cabin, Ralph raising his voice a little because of the noise of the wind among the trees, went on to say.

"I can now understand what heretofore perplexed me not a little—why Uncle Dick bought this remote and neglected farm of Black Dale, and why he chose to live here alone with Job. Yes, I see it all now, and very shrewd the old chap was. I begin to have a new respect for him."

After some further conversation Sneath started to his feet, exclaiming: "Hark! What was that?"

"A faint shout uttered in a man's voice," answered Ralph.

"Yes, and it sounded as if it was carried from a distance on the wind," assented Jack.

Just then the shout they had previously heard sounded again. But this time it was faint, and evidently the person who uttered it was going from the clearing.

"Now for the story you have to tell us," said Ralph.

"Well, you must know," began Sneath, "I was at the hospital where your Uncle Dick lay sick for a while, and during my stay there, as a companion for your uncle, I got acquainted with a man who had been a gold miner in California. He was poor and disheartened then, but he had once been rich. He told me that he made a lucky strike on a placer claim he owned and took out two hundred thousand dollars' worth of gold. That snug fortune he converted into coin, which he shipped by express to the East, but the train that carried his treasure was held up by the notorious robber, Captain Midnight, and his desperate band of outlaws, and all the money of the California miner was stolen. He learned later on, through the assistance of the railway detectives and sheriff's officers, that Midnight deserted his band secretly immediately after the robbery and fled with all the proceeds of it without giving his men any share, as he had agreed. This came out through the confession of one of the gang, who was very bitter against Midnight. That outlaw said the other members of the gang had sworn to hunt Midnight down and slay him for his treachery and take from him the plunder of which they claimed their share."

Sneath paused and Jack said, excitedly:

"This is just like a romance. It must be that

the treasure Captain Midnight concealed at Black Dale is the money that belongs to the unfortunate miner."

"I have no doubt of that," Sneath replied. "The poor fellow we will call Dix. And he told me that the loss of his hard-earned gold almost drove him crazy for a time, but that he had set out to hunt for Captain Midnight on his own account, when he was taken sick. I was quite moved by the story he told me of his wanderings in quest of the fugitive train-robber. He said he had intended that the gold he had mined in California should provide for the wants of his declining years, and that he had meant to appropriate a goodly share of the fortune for the good of others. He had two sisters, who had died leaving children in poverty, and he said he had intended that his wealth should help those poor orphans to make their way in the world, which his own experiences had taught him was a hard and cruel place for the poor and friendless. His most bitter regret seemed to be that, because of the loss of his stolen fortune, he could not do anything for the poor children for whom he had meant to provide."

Sneath paused and Jack said, earnestly:

"I am glad that you have told us all this, and now I pledge you my word of honor that if we find the old miner's stolen fortune they shall have every cent of it. I would rather die than keep the money of that old man and deprive the poor orphans of what he so nobly meant to give them."

CHAPTER IX.—Ralph Is Shown In an Unfavorable Light.

"You are mighty sentimental about it, I think," said Ralph, when a moment of silence had ensued. "But perhaps Dix, the miner, died at the hospital. How was that, Sneath?"

"Dix did not die, as I happen to know, and if it should be our good fortune to find his money hidden at Black Dale, I know where to communicate with him," replied the caretaker.

"And would you do so?" demanded Ralph.

"Certainly I should."

"Then you're a fool!"

Sneath looked a trifle indignant, but his weather-beaten face showed more sorrow than any other sentiment.

"I am sorry to see that you are so avaricious. Do you not see that it would bet a most dishonorable and contemptible act to keep the old miner's fortune?" he said, chidingly.

"You can keep your opinion of me to yourself. I own one-half of Black Dale farm and I've got just as much right as Jack has to say what shall be done with the money we may find on the place," Ralph blurted out, in angry tones.

"I am ashamed of you, Ralph," said Jack. "Ashamed and surprised at your spirit of avarice. I did not think you would show such cupidity. I supposed you had a better conscience and that you were honest at heart."

"Well, lads," said the old caretaker, "take an old man's advice and do not allow the matter of the hidden fortune to make hard feelings between you, now. It will be time enough to decide what you will do with the money when you have discovered it. You may never find it. It is my conviction that the men who broke into the house

at Black Dale tonight are really members of Captain Midnight's old band of train robbers, and that they will never give up trying to find the hidden money until they are convinced it is beyond their reach."

"Your words hold out a pleasant prospect. Are we to stay at Black Dale and risk our lives to keep the outlaws from getting the treasure for nothing?" demanded Ralph, sarcastically.

"My lad," responded Sneath, gravely, "have you never heard that good deeds usually bring their own reward? I am an old man now, and I have had much experience of the world. You can safely believe me when I say that I am convinced that anything we may do to restore the stolen money to its rightful owner will not be wasted labor."

After that, conversation flagged and the hours wore on until the dawn came. Job then proposed that they should return to the farmhouse.

"The shadows are gone now. They flee when the sun comes. Job knows we shall not meet them," said the strange lad, in tones of assurance.

Just as the party was leaving the cabin a company of half a dozen lumbermen, who were on the way to the scene of their daily toil at a portable sawmill some miles away in the woods, came into the clearing. Sneath knew these men and he called to them. When they came up he related the attack upon Black Dale farmhouse by the strangers, but he did not say anything about his belief regarding the motive which actuated the rascals—gave no hint that he supposed they were after Captain Midnight's hidden treasure. Sneath proposed that the lumbermen should alarm the farms of the neighborhood and the township constable so that search might be made for the desperadoes. The lumbermen promised to do this, and they set out in different directions to visit the isolated farms and carry the news to the market town. The caretaker and the lads made their way to Black Dale, and they reached the farmhouse without seeing anything of the strangers.

Along about noon a party of mounted men rode up to the farmhouse, and they proved to be a couple of local constables and some farmers who had joined the officers in a quest for the housebreakers. They informed Sneath that they had ridden all about the adjacent country, but had failed to find any trace of the robbers.

CHAPTER X.—The Maid of the Inn at Black Dale.

"I think because the outlaws know that the hue and cry has been raised for them that they have withdrawn from the neighborhood for the time. But I am also confident that we have not by any means seen the last of them," said Sneath the next day.

Jack and Ralph agreed with him, and they discussed how to make their position more secure. Job was present with his huge tame wolf. The party occupied the shaded porch, and Nick, the wolf, seemed to understand that the young heirs of Black Dale belonged there, and the animal manifested no hostile inclinations regarding them.

"Door and windows are what folks get into house by. Shut the doors and windows so no one can get in, says Job," remarked the half-wit.

"A good idea," remarked Jack. "Sneath, I propose that we get heavy blinds made for the windows and that we strengthen the doors and provide them with extra fastenings."

"Yes. I will send Job to the mill with a note," answered Sneath.

A little later the half-witted boy set off, accompanied by his tame wolf, who seemed to be his inseparable companion.

By noon Job returned and reported that the window blinds he had been sent to order would be ready in a few days. After dinner, Job and Sneath went out to work in the garden, while the boys slept. That night Sneath and Job took turns in standing watch. But there was no alarm. On the following day Jack announced that he was sufficiently rested and that he meant to set to work. Ralph followed when his cousin went out to the fields with the caretaker and Job, and in a half-hearted way he set to work with the others, hoeing corn. But the sun was hot and the labor did not please Ralph in the least.

Presently he threw down his hoe and sauntered away into the shade of a nearby grove, through which the lane ran. No one remonstrated with Ralph, but Sneath, who was working near Jack and showing him how to cultivate corn, said:

"I'm afraid your cousin is inclined to be a drone in the hive."

Jack did not reply, but glancing in the direction of the grove, he observed that Job, who had been at work at the edge of the field nearest the trees, had disappeared. After that Jack and Sneath worked in silence for some time, but half an hour elapsed and neither Ralph or Job returned to the field.

"Strange that Job should neglect his work so long. This isn't like him," then said Sneath.

"Perhaps the object which he set out to catch has led him a long chase," suggested Jack. "As for Ralph, I presume we shall not see him in the field again today."

Sneath cast a troubled glance toward the grove in which Job had disappeared, but said no more then. And somehow Jack found himself thinking more about Mattie, the maid of the inn, than anything else. He wondered if she led a pleasant life there, with the rascally innkeeper and his wife; and he feared that her lot was not altogether a pleasant one. Anon he caught himself building castles in the air, and pretty Mattie was the central figure in every one of those imaginary structures.

Meanwhile, Ralph had thrown himself down in the shade of a great tree that grew beside a thick hedge near the lane.

"I don't like this. Farm work is only fit for ignorant laborers who know nothing better. I'd much rather employ myself in searching for the hidden money—yes, I'll do that, and I only hope I may find it when I am alone, that's all. In that case it shall all be mine. I'll not let Sneath or Jack know, but find a way to leave with the treasure as soon as I can."

Not long after that he caught the sound of voices, and creeping up to the hedge, as he recognized Job's tones, he raised himself cautiously and peered over the leafy barrier. Just a few

moments previously a slender, girlish figure had appeared in the lane, coming toward the cornfield. She had proceeded until she was near Ralph's resting-place, when Job, followed by his tame wolf, leaped the hedge directly in her path-way. Mattie uttered a frightened exclamation, but she knew Job well, for he had often come to the inn, and as soon as she saw who it was that so abruptly confronted her, all traces of fright fled from her sweet face.

Job had a butterfly-catcher's net in one hand and a bunch of wild violets in the other. As Nick frisked about the young girl in friendly recognition, Job tendered her the violets.

"Thank you, Job," said she, as she took them.

"I saw you coming, pretty Mattie, and so I gathered them for you. Oh, Mattie, Job always likes to see you. You are like the violets, sweet and pretty. Job likes you and so does Nick. Do you like Job?" said the half-witted boy.

"Why, of course," said Mattie, coloring under the devoted gaze of the strange lad's great blue eyes. "But where are the others. I've been to the house. I want to see one of the strange lads. The one called Jack."

"Sneath and the others are in the cornfield. But what do you want of the strange boy? Do you like him better than Job? Why didn't you come to see Job?" answered the demented lad, with a jealous frown.

"I have something to say to the boy called Jack. Will you tell him I am here? You and I are old friends and shall always be, I hope."

Ralph had heard this conversation, and he said to himself, grinning:

"By George! the half-wit is in love with her. This is rich! She's an awfully pretty girl. Can't say that I blame Master Job very much."

Then he vaulted over the hedge, raised his hat and said to Mattie, who drew back at his approach:

"I beg your pardon, but I couldn't help over-hearing what you said. Won't I do as well as Jack?"

Mattie bit her red lips and looked as if she was not very well pleased, but she said:

"Well, then, there is a man at the inn who came by the stage to-day whom I believe is one of the gang that raided Black Dale, and I want to warn you that he has some object of an evil character regarding Black Dale in mind," said Mattie.

CHAPTER XI.—"How Shall We Find the Treasure?"

Ralph manifested the greatest interest as he listened to Mattie, and when she had spoken he said:

"I think I had better call Jack and old Sneath. They will want to hear all about this from your own lips."

The young girl assented, and Ralph ran down the lane, leaped the hedge and, going to the edge of the cornfield, called out to the two who were yet at work there.

"The girl from the inn is here and she wants to see you!" Ralph shouted.

"Tell her we'll come at once!" answered Jack, in surprised tones, and, dropping his hoe, he hastened across the field, followed by Sneath.

They joined Ralph, who awaited their approach,

and he led them to the lane in which they found Mattie and Job where Ralph had left them.

Jack greeted Mattie pleasantly and the old caretaker addressed some kind words to her. Then she repeated what she had already told Ralph.

"You say the stranger came by the stage to-day? Are we to infer that he came to the inn openly? Have you seen him there before, and why do you think he means harm for us?" said Jack.

"The stranger alighted at the inn before all the other passengers, like any traveler who had nothing to conceal. I have never seen him before, but when the stage had gone I overheard him talking with my uncle," Mattie replied.

"What did he say?" asked Jack, anxiously.

"He handed my uncle a note, saying: 'This will tell you that I am sent by your friend, Bagger, and it will tell you that I am here on account of the Black Dale business.'"

"Did you hear anything more?" was Jack's next eager inquiry.

"Yes, Uncle Isaac read the note which the stranger had given him and then he said:

"'Good! Bagger is a clever dog. This plan may work. It's worth trying, anyhow, and I like it better than high-handed and violent attempts. To say the truth, I'm afraid of getting into trouble by hiding Bagger and his comrades, and I won't do it again. But as you come like any other traveler and don't want to hide, it's all right. I needed money or I wouldn't have let Bagger and his friend stay in hiding here.'"

Again Mattie paused. Then she added:

"But now I must go."

As she turned away, Jack walked with her up the lane, and Job followed the young couple with jealous eyes and an angry expression came upon his features as he looked.

"Ha!" he muttered, so indistinctly that his words were not overheard. "Both of the strange lads like Mattie, but she belongs to Job. Let them like her if they will. She shall not like them. No, no! She will like Job the best, for he can give her the yellow beauties of his house of gold that will buy all the pretty things in the world," and the half-witted boy chuckled as if he were sure that he could buy the love of the maid of the inn with the mysterious treasures of which he spoke so fancifully.

Jack and Mattie conversed as they walked along the shady lane that beautiful spring day and it came to the lad that the pretty girl at his side was the fairest and sweetest maid that he had ever known.

When she came to her horse Jack assisted her to mount, and, waving her hand in parting salutation, she cantered away. Jack walked down the lane in a reflective mood and fully convinced that Mattie was dearer to him than all the hidden treasure in the world. He soon found that all his companions had returned to the cornfield and he joined them there. Evening came at length and yet no one save the maid of the inn had come to Black Dale. After supper Jack and his companions fell to talking as they sat on the shaded porch.

"Job," said Jack, earnestly, "you were here with Midnight when he hid the treasure. Try and think if you cannot remember anything about it."

"Job never saw the treasure. Job never saw

him hide it. Who says Job knows? Job don't know. Job can't think," the half-wit replied.

CHAPTER XII.—Ralph Follows ob by Moonlight.

All saw that evidently they could not hope to obtain any assistance from Job. Job sat with his head in his hands and he seemed to be reflecting profoundly while the tame wolf sat at his feet and watched him closely with its bright eyes.

"I think the only thing we can do is to act upon your suggestion. Let us do so. Hereafter let us devote a part of each day to our search," said Sneath.

"Yes, we will begin on the morrow," assented Jack, and Ralph signified his approval.

Just then Job raised his head. There was a cunning and exultant look in his usually vacant eyes as he said:

"Job is beginning to remember things about Captain Midnight. Yes, Job's wits are at work. Midnight used to go to the old well slyly like when Job was asleep. Many times he went there at night. Job wondered why."

Ralph sprang to his feet, exclaiming, excitedly: "Why did you not tell us that before? Where is the old well? Lead us to it. Likely enough the treasure is hidden in it. I always thought you could tell us something about it if you would."

Jack and old Sneath evidently shared Ralph's excitement. The former turned to the old caretaker and asked:

"Do you know where to find the old well? Have you ever searched it?"

"No, I never before knew anything about it." "Job will lead you to it. Get bucket and rope!" cried the half-wit.

Sneath hastened into the house and immediately came back with the articles mentioned. Then Job led the way from the house, in a southerly direction. At length he paused in the rear of the outbuildings, under a great tree. The old well is here. Midnight covered it up," said he, stamping upon the earth where a stone protruded from the earth. The stone was large enough to completely cover the opening, and when it was out of the way the foul, confined air rushed up from the well. In it they could see nothing.

Jack proposed to descend. He dropped down the pick and then climbed down the rugged stones that composed the wall and so reached the bottom. Then he set to work with pick and dug for some time. But he made no discovery, and at length he climbed up to the surface and said:

"There is nothing hidden at the bottom of the well now, I am certain. If the ex-train-robber ever kept his treasure there he must have removed it before his death, or some one else has taken it away."

"He used to go to the old well o' nights. Job says so and he knows," said the half-wit.

The night came on brilliant with the light of the moon, and as Job volunteered to stand watch for the first part of the night, the others soon retired. Jack fell asleep, while Ralph sat at the window looking out into the moonlight.

An hour or two elapsed and still Ralph did not go to bed. The fact was he had a definite purpose in remaining awake.

"It is a bright moonlight night and they say

Job has a habit of wandering about on such nights. I'll warrant he has some secret object in so doing and I suspect if he knows where the treasure is he may go to look at it by night. Now, if he leaves the house to-night I mean to find out where he goes. Oh, you are a cunning one, Master Job, for all your unbalanced mind," Ralph was reflecting as he sat at the window.

But at length he became sleepy and began to think he was depriving himself of needed rest for nothing. He was almost dropping off in a doze when he heard soft footsteps on the porch under his window. Then he became wide awake in an instant. The curtain concealed him, but peering out he saw Job descend the porch steps and glide swiftly away in a northerly course.

"Ah, Master Job, so you are off at last!" muttered Ralph, and then, as he saw the wolf at the lad's heels, he added, mentally:

"Confound the wolf! I must be careful or he'll give Job warning."

With that he crept from the room and was soon outside of the house. Job was still in sight. Ralph crept along a bushgrown fence after him, and when the demented boy entered an adjacent woods Ralph was not far behind him. On and on went Job. And Ralph continued to follow him stealthily. At length the half-witted boy suddenly disappeared from Ralph's sight, and advancing more rapidly, as he was assailed by fear of losing him, Ralph found himself at the foot of a rocky and densely wooded hill. But he looked about in vain for Job. The strange youth had vanished completely. For an hour Ralph cautiously searched for him. Then he gave up the quest as useless and set out for the house.

When Ralph reached the house he crept up to his room and found Jack sound asleep. He went to the window and as he looked out he saw Job approaching the house. Having heard the half-witted boy enter the dwelling, Ralph went to bed and soon fell asleep to dream of the hidden treasure. In the morning the inmates of the isolated farmhouse were early astir and after breakfast, as they were about to set out to devote a few hours to the proposed search, they heard the rattle of wheels and presently saw an open buggy, drawn by one horse, driven up to the house by Isaac Krugg. Upon the seat beside the landlord was a well-dressed, middle-aged person who had the appearance of a well-to-do business man. Krugg and his companion alighted and as Sneath and the boys went out on the porch to meet them, Jack whispered to the old caretaker:

"I presume the stranger whom Krugg has brought here is the man of whose presence at the inn Mattie informed us. We must be on our guard and show no suspicion. We must let him think we take him for whatever he may pretend to be. Then he will show his hand—open the stratagem which I suspect he has come here to attempt, with the purpose, of course, of paving the way to secure the treasure, which he and his confederates covet."

Sneath nodded assent and proceeded, as did the boys, to meet Krugg's effusively friendly greeting.

HAPTER XIII.—Job in the Hands of the Enemy.

"This here gent are Mr. Bates an' he are a-buyn' up timber land. He came to the 'Dor an'

Gun' yesterday, an' says he, 'Landlord, I want to git a farm where there are a chance fer water power, an' plenty o' timber near,' an' says I, 'There's just the sort o' place to suit ye near. It are Black Dale farm.' 'We'll look at it,' says he, an' so here we are. Mr. Bates, Mr. Sneath and the two boys own the place, as I told you about; fine young chaps, an' the sort of business man kin do business with, I opine," said Krugg, in his voluble way.

The introduction was duly acknowledged, and Sneath invited the guests to be seated. They took chairs on the porch and Mr. Bates said:

"I am willing to pay a fair price for this farm if it suits me, and I'd like you to show me over it," he seemed to address his remarks to Jack, and so the latter, to whom the game of the rascal was now clear, of course, replied.

"By the terms of the will of our uncle, who left this farm to my cousin and I, we are not allowed to dispose of it, and so it will be quite useless for us to show over it or discuss the matter further."

Mr. Bates looked very much disappointed, but he said, trying to cover his discomfiture:

"Of course, such being the case, I suppose it would be of no use to offer you an extra high price for the place, and so I will not do so. But if there was the least chance for a deal I would argue the matter."

After this some days elapsed and the occupants of Black Dale were not disturbed. But they were not by this period of immunity from trouble by any means lulled into a feeling of security.

On the contrary, they were all of the opinion that the outlaws were planning some new move against them. Three days after Bates visited Black Dale the window-shutters which had been ordered from the mill arrived, and with them came a carpenter, who put them in place. The blinds were of oak and they could be secured by heavy iron bolts. The carpenter strengthened the doors by means of heavy planks and additional bars. When his work was done he said:

"I reckon now you are in good shape to stand a siege here. If there were only some loop-holes in the shutters and doors the old house would be a regular fort."

"You have suggested a good idea. We will have the loop-holes put in," said Jack.

Accordingly, the carpenter set to work and before he left the house he had made a small loop-hole in each one of the window-shutters and also in the upper panel of each door. The latter were provided with sliding shields, and were really miniature wickets, through which the inmates could look outside, as well as discharge their weapons if they wished.

About ten days later, during which time the occupants of Black Dale had not been disturbed in any way, they were astonished one morning to find that Job was absent. The preceding night had been one of bright moonlight, but no one had seen Job leave the house. Noon came and Job did not come. The afternoon wore away and night came, still the half-witted boy remained absent.

"We must make a search for the lad. I will ride over to the inn and inquire for him there, while you and Ralph search about the place," replied Sneath.

A little later he rode away, mounted on old

Dobbin. And Jack and Ralph armed themselves and set out to look for Job in the woods. As they left the house they saw the tame wolf leaping at the length of his chain, howling and snarling and making desperate efforts to break loose. He appeared so savage that neither of the lads cared to try to loosen him. In the woods they became separated, and Jack had proceeded for some distance alone, when he was startled by hearing a crashing sound in the bushes close by, and in a moment Job's tame wolf dashed by, dragging a few links of broken chain by his collar. As the wolf darted along, with its nose to the ground, as if it was following a scent, a happy thought occurred to Jack.

"It may be that the wolf is following Job's trail," he muttered, and on the chance that this might prove to be so, he set out after the wolf.

But though he ran at full speed, the swift-footed animal quickly distanced him and passed out of sight. But keeping the same course that the wolf had taken, the lad pressed onward as rapidly as possible, and at length he came to the edge of the clearing on which stood the abandoned cabin of the lumbermen. Looking forward under the moonlight, Jack saw the wolf scratching furiously at the closed door of the cabin.

"I'll warrant that Job is there," the lad thought, and so he went forward swiftly.

Reaching the door, he called the wolf by name and the animal permitted him to come close. Then he saw that since the night when he and his companion sought shelter there a heavy hasp secured by a massive padlock had been placed upon the door. He was unable to open it. But in cautious tones he called:

"Job! Job! Are you inside?"

There was no answer and, having repeated the call without result, he went to a little window and looked in. The moonlight enabled him to see Job on the cabin floor, and he observed that the lad was bound hand and foot; also that there was a gag between his jaws. The window was small, but Jack managed to crawl through it and in a few moments he cut the cords that held the demented youth and got the gag out of his teeth. Job sprang to his feet and grasped Jack's hands as he said, fervently:

"Job thanks you. You have saved poor Job. The shadows took him in the woods. They said they would starve him here until he told them where Captain Midnight's money was hidden."

CHAPTER XIV.—Jack Rescues the Half-wit.

"The door is fastened and we shall have to crawl out through the window," said Jack.

"Yes," assented Job.

Jack approached the window. But at that moment he caught the sound of approaching footsteps, and the wolf began to howl savagely.

"The shadows are coming. Job knows their footsteps. They will catch us here," said the demented boy in low tones.

Jack looked through the window and the brilliant moonlight enabled him to see two men who were approaching the cabin. One of them exclaimed, as the lad looked:

"See! As I live, Bagger, there's the half-wit's tame wolf! The animal has tracked the lad to the cabin!"

"That's so, Hanson; give the wolf a shot!" said the other man, and so Jack knew that the outlaws who had led the attack on Black Dale farmhouse were back in the neighborhood again.

As Bagger spoke, Hanson raised a rifle, which he carried, and the report instantly rang out. But evidently his aim was bad, for the tame wolf darted away to the cover of the woods.

"If we go through the window they will see us. If we remain here until they get the door open we may get away, by making a sudden dash," said Jack.

"Yes, you have a gun, kill them if they try to stop us," replied Job.

In a moment the two men were at the door and Jack and Job stood before it, ready to leap out. They heard the key rattle in the padlock. Then the door opened. Jack made a leap and sprang out between Bagger and Hanson, giving the latter a tremendous push that brought him to the ground. Job leaped after Jack, dealing Bagger a kick in the stomach that doubled him up on the earth beside his companion. The boys flew toward the farmhouse, and they had a start which they maintained. The men behind them ordered them to halt, threatening to shoot if they did not obey. Of course, they paid no attention to the commands of their pursuers. Once Hanson raised his rifle as if to fire, but Bagger grasped his arm, exclaiming:

"Don't shoot! you may kill the half-wit!"

Evidently, Job's life was safe as long as the enemy hoped he might yet be compelled to give them the information they sought.

"I wonder if they will chase us clear to the farmhouse, and if they'll try to get in?" panted Job, as they continued their swift flight through the woods.

"If they attack the house we can give them a warm reception and hold them off, I am sure, since now the house has been placed in a good condition for defense," replied Jack.

But, anon, the sounds of pursuit gradually died away in the rear and finally they no longer heard them at all. Then the lads moderated their rapid pace and presently fell into a walk in order to regain their breath. A little later then they saw a gleam of light ahead and Job added:

"There's a light in the window of the farmhouse."

Jack assented and, quickening their pace, they presently came out into the open fields of Black Dale farm and approached the house. As they reached it old Sneath and Ralph appeared at the door, and both welcomed Job warmly. In a few words he and Jack made known how the latter had found and rescued his companion. Of course, there was little sleep for any of the inmates of the farmhouse during the ensuing hours of darkness, and they secured all the window-blinds, as well as the door, when they went into the dwelling to watch and wait for the coming of the dawn. The hours of gloom passed and daylight came, yet they had neither heard nor seen anything of the enemy.

"I think we had better warn the local authorities that the rascals are about again," said Sneath in the morning.

"Even though I have little hope that the country officers will succeed in capturing the cunning rascals, I think they may frighten them off for a time."

Jack and Ralph approved of this and, accordingly, directly after breakfast Sneath mounted old Dobbin and rode away. Jack took him aside just before he mounted the horse and said:

"I think you had better advise the local officers to place a hidden watchman near the inn on the chance that the rascals may visit it. You can do this without directing suspicion to Krugg as their accomplice. On Mattie's account I do not want to get him into trouble."

Sneath assented, and when he was gone Jack left the house and sauntered away alone. He wandered to the lane where he had met Mattie, and truth to say, he was thinking of her, when all at once the bushes beside the lane parted and the object of his thoughts stood before him.

"Mattie, you here? Well, this is a pleasant surprise!" he exclaimed, taking her small hands in his. She blushed a little as she replied:

"I have just come from the inn, and this time I stole away, while Uncle Isaac thinks I am out looking for one of the cows that has strayed away. Once more I have ventured here in order to warn you."

"Does any new danger threaten us, then?" asked Jack.

"Yes. At a late hour last night, as I sat at my open window without a light, I saw two men—they were Bagger and Hanson—come to the inn. One of them uttered a peculiar whistle, which was evidently a signal, for the stranger called Bates immediately came out of the inn and joined them under the window."

"Yes, and you overheard what they said?" asked Jack, eagerly, as she paused.

"I overheard Bagger say, 'Job has escaped and we must be off out of the neighborhood, for the officers will be after us again on the morrow. Do you follow us. I am bound to bring things to a climax soon, though.'"

CHAPTER XV.—The Demented Boy and Mattie.

Again Mattie paused and suddenly directed a frightened glance at the bushes whence she came. At the same time Jack thought he heard a faint rustling sound in the cover. Jack made a signal to enjoy silence upon her part, and suddenly darted into the bushes, meaning to surprise the eavesdropper, if there was one hidden in the cover. But he came back in a moment or so, looking entirely reassured, and he hastened to say:

"There is no one there. It must have been a bird or some small animal that rustled the bushes. Now go on, please, and tell me all."

"After Bagger spoke, as I have said, he went on to say, fiercely: 'We will come again when the excitement occasioned by this visit is over. And the next time we come there shall be an end of our quest, one way or the other. We'll get the hidden money then, or I swear there'll be some dead men at Black Dale.'"

"Was that all?" asked Jack, as Mattie paused, shuddering as if the memory of the words of the desperate outlaw inspired her with terror.

"Yes, that was all. Bagger and Hanson hastened away and Bates re-entered the inn. This morning he went away on the stage, bound for the railway station, he said."

When Mattie left Jack at the end of the lane

he watched her out of sight, and then returned to the farmhouse, believing himself to be the happiest boy in all the world. But though he was sure that no one had been concealed in the bushes beside the lane when he met his girlish sweetheart, he was in error. Job had slyly followed Jack to the lane. The way led northward from the house, and it seemed that Job was suspicious of the motive of any one who went in that particular direction, for as he stole after Jack. When Jack met Mattie, Job crept up under the adjacent bushes and peered through the branches. Thus he was able to witness the meeting, and also to hear what the young couple said. When Mattie showed that she suspected there was some one hidden in the cover, as Job accidentally rustled the branches, the cunning lad glided away, noiselessly.

Thus it came about that Jack failed to discover him. When Jack had returned to the lane, Job stealthily crept back to his former position, and he overheard every word of the conversation that immediately ensued between the young lovers. After Mattie's departure, when Jack had left the lane, Job emerged from his hiding-place, and it was noticeable that his usually vacant—almost expressionless face—had undergone an amazing transformation. The demented lad was absolutely livid. His great blue eyes flashed with rage, his hands were clenched, and for a moment he stood with his face set in the direction which Mattie had taken, speechless—a silent personification of evil passions. Then he shook his fists after Jack and muttered:

"Mattie liked Job best until he came. Mattie would always have liked Job but for him. Now he will take her away from Job. But no! no! He shall not do it! Job will not lose his queen—she who is to share the yellow beauties of Job's house of gold."

With that the demented lad set out swiftly in pursuit of Mattie. Suddenly Mattie heard a stealthy step behind her. She turned like a flash and at the same instant Job grasped her arm and there was something in his face that terrified her as he said:

"Mattie, you must come with Job!"

CHAPTER XVI.—Job Attempts an Abduction

Never before had Mattie experienced any fear of the demented lad, for she, in common with every one in the neighborhood, had always considered him to be quite harmless. But now she knew instinctively that, in his clouded intellect, some purpose entirely different from the innocent vagaries which usually characterized him had been formed. And she knew that, because of the great strength of the young giant, she could not hope to offer effectual resistance. But Mattie was a quick-witted and self-reliant girl, and she decided that the best she could do was to temporize with him and try to outwit him.

So, striving to conceal the alarm which his manner more than his words had awakened in her mind, she said, pleasantly:

"Yes, Job, but where do you want me to go?"

The giant youth regarded her sweet face searchingly as he replied:

"Job would take you where he cannot find you."

A vague perception of what was coming dawned in Mattie's mind. In truth, it flashed upon her with the suddenness of lightning that Job's jealousy was aroused. She thought that he might have been the cause of the rustling in the bushes beside the lane and, of course, she knew that he regarded her with the devotion which was absolute and dog-like in its fidelity. Mattie flushed a bit as she said:

"I don't understand you, Job."

"Oh, yes, you know what Job means. You can't fool him. They say Job is not like other folks, but he knows what he reads in your face," he said.

Her fears increased, but she said:

"You have not told me where you want me to go, Job."

"Job will tell you. He wants you to go away to Job's house in the woods, where the boy you like better than him cannot find you. But you will like Job best when he shows you what he has to give you. Job will make you a queen, with his yellow beauties. Come, let's be going."

"Wait a moment, Job. You know, if I go away without saying a word to uncle or anybody it will not be right. There will be a great search made for me and my uncle will take me away from you. Come to the inn and let me say good-by to Uncle Krugg and my aunt," she replied.

"Oh, no! Job is too smart for that! Krugg would not let you go. Job knows Krugg and he doesn't like him. Krugg laughs at Job and he is friendly with the shadows," the demented boy answered.

Mattie started as she heard this and wondered how the strange lad had discovered that Krugg was friendly with the men who were seeking for the hidden fortune.

"Is it far to your home in the woods, Job?" she asked, and now she began to supplicate devoutly in her heart that some one might come along the pathway. "I am tired and I cannot walk far," she added.

"Then Job will carry you. Job is very strong. Job is stronger than any one," he said.

Then he laughed exultantly, as he continued: "Let them search for you if they will. Let them look high and low, they will never find you. Job has no fear of that."

Mattie was at her wit's end and she was desperate, too. Feeling that he had relaxed the tightness of his hold upon her arm a little, she made a sudden, quick movement and disengaged herself from his grasp. Then she bounded away along the pathway, running in the direction of the inn. Job was surprised and for an instant he stood dumfounded. Then he dashed in swift pursuit of the fleeing girl. And as he ran he called out:

"Stop, Mattie! Don't run! Job means no harm! He only wants to keep you from the strange boy who has come to Black Dale!"

But, of course, Mattie did not heed him, and as he was swiftly coming after her she bounded around a sharp curve in the pathways. Then her heart leaped to her throat and she uttered a glad cry as, to her joyful surprise, she came face to face with her uncle, Isaac Krugg, and a farm-hand of his. She uttered another joyous cry as she neared them and Krugg shouted:

"Hello, Mattie! So we have found you?"

Hearing his voice, Job paused, out of sight,

around the bend in the pathway. For a moment he stood still. Then he wheeled and ran swiftly away, muttering:

"Another time they will not come to take Mattie away. Job will wait and bid his time."

Meantime, Krugg and the farm-hand met Mattie. Without speaking, save to reply to some unimportant remarks that were made by her uncle, Mattie walked on with him and the farm-hand until they arrived at Krugg's farm, which extended about the old inn.

Then Mattie left her companions and returned to the house, while they proceeded into an adjacent strip of timber to continue the search upon which they had set out. Mattie had to answer a number of impatient questions that were put by her aunt when she entered the inn. But she soon managed to escape from the presence of the questioner, making the excuse that she was completely tired out. Then she sought the solitude of her own room, there to further reflect upon the exciting and unforeseen incidents that had just transpired.

CHAPTER XVII.—Ralph Wants to Discharge Sneath.

After this the young heirs of Black Dale and their companions were not troubled in any way by the strangers who had so boldly attempted to secure the hidden fortune, while weeks passed.

Meantime, Jack noticed that Job treated him very coolly, and he was at a loss to understand the reason of this until, after some time had elapsed since the never-to-be-forgotten day when he had plighted his troth with pretty Mattie in the lane, because she did not come to Black Dale, he made an excuse to call at the inn, telling Krugg he had come to borrow a harrow. Krugg received him kindly and when Jack called for Mattie he sent her to the lad and left them alone on the inn porch, where they became seated.

"After all, it's best to be on the safe side. Who knows but the lad may find Midnight's fortune after all. Then he'll be rich an' he'll soon be old enough to marry. He has taken quite a shine to Mattie. I can see that," said Krugg, as he left the young couple alone.

Clearly, it never entered the landlord's head that if Jack found the treasure he would hand it over to its rightful owner. Of course, Mattie was delighted to see Jack and they both thought it kind of Krugg to give them an opportunity to talk privately. They conversed of what was nearest the heart of each and spoke of the future, which both, with the hope of youth, saw only as a bright vista full of happiness for them. But finally Mattie related all about Job's attempt to carry her off, and repeated his significant words about his "yellow beauties." At that Jack exclaimed:

"Oh, now I really believe it must be Job knows where the treasure is and that he has deliberately deceived us all along. When he showed us the covered well I suspected he knew the treasure was not there. More than that, I think it quite probable that Midnight did hide the treasure in the well and that Job removed it and secreted it elsewhere."

Mattie said she agreed with Jack and then he remarked:

"Now I think I know why Job has treated me so coldly since that day in the lane. He is jealous of me. Poor boy! I hope his jealousy will not prompt him to do me an injury."

"Oh, I hope not! But you must look out. One cannot tell a demented person like Job may do under these circumstances. But about the treasure, I am sure Job will never reveal where it is, assuming, as we have already done, that he has hidden it. What do you mean to do, now that I have told you of Job's remarks about his 'yellow beauties?'" she asked.

"I know of nothing that I can do, since it will be useless to try to induce Job to tell anything against his will."

"You might watch and follow him when he does not suspect such a thing. I have heard that he has a habit of wandering about on moonlight nights. On such occasions, likely enough, he visits the hiding-place of the treasure."

"I agree with you. But he is so cunning that I have little hope of surprising his secret in the way you suggest. However, it's worth the trial," answered Jack, who did not know that Ralph had already been following Job at night without success. When Jack presently took leave of Mattie and left the inn he was fully resolved to follow Job secretly. Reaching Black Dale he sought Sneath and related, under the pledge of secrecy, what Mattie had told him.

"I am sorry to dash your hopes to the ground," said the old caretaker, when he had listened to all that the lad had to tell, "but the fact is, before you came here I suspected Job and many and many a night I secretly followed him, but all in vain. He always eluded me in the woods, and I fear you will succeed no better than I have done."

During succeeding weeks Jack sought to track Job, but as if the demented lad knew he was watched, he discontinued his habit of roaming about on moonlight nights, after Jack had vainly followed him a couple of evenings.

Jack continued to work hard with Sneath and Job during the long days of the early summer, and soon the run-down farm began to assume a much more thrifty and well-kept appearance. The fences were repaired and the fields that had been neglected until they were overgrown with bushes were cleared and the crops were faithfully cultivated until they gave certain promise of a rich harvest. And now that he had become accustomed to hard work, Jack found the life he was leading by no means unpleasant. He found time to call upon Mattie frequently, and Isaac Krugg and his wife always treated him kindly. One evening when he was leaving the inn, after passing an hour or two with Mattie, Krugg followed him, saying:

"I want to have a few words with you."

Jack wondered what was coming, but he replied, affably:

"Certainly, Mr. Krugg."

"The fact is, I've noticed you have taken quite a shine to Mattie and she to you. Some time, when you are older, if this goes on, I reckon you'll be comin' to me some fine day and askin' if you can have Mattie. Plain an' plenty are my motto about grub, an' plain speakin' is what I like in talk, so says I to you, if you git that treasure, which I've changed my mind about, and

now think may yet be hidden at Black Dale, I'll say you kin marry Mattie, an' bless you, my children; I can't say fairer now, can I?"

"Perhaps not," replied Jack, a little confused. "And you may be sure I'll do my best to find the hidden money."

CHAPTER XVIII.—Ralph Leaves Black Dale

A few days later Jack and Sneath were about to leave the farmhouse, accompanied by Job, meaning to begin the day's work in a distant field. It was unusually early for them to leave the house and Ralph, who seldom put in an appearance at breakfast with the others, since he had now ceased to make even a pretense of working, was supposed to be asleep. But just as Jack and his companions were leaving the house, Ralph came down from his room with his valise in his hands and they saw that he was attired in his best suit.

"Good-morning, Ralph!" said Jack. "Where are you going?" and his surprised tone indicated that he had no knowledge that his cousin had meditated a journey.

"I'm going to leave this lonesome old place for good. I'm going back to the town we came from, that's what I'm going to do," answered Ralph, in surly tones.

"Don't go, Ralph," urged Jack.

"It's no use talking to me. I won't bury myself here any longer. I should have left long ago if it had not been for the hope of finding the hidden money. Now I've given up that and so I'm off," answered Ralph.

"Stop and think a bit, lad," advised Sneath.

"What shall I think of? There's nothing to divert one's mind here."

Seeing that they could not induce Ralph to change his mind, Jack and the others finally made him good-by and proceeded to the field.

A little later Jack saw his cousin walking away along the road which they traversed when they first came to Black Dale.

"Poor Ralph! He is making a mistake, perhaps, but since it seems that he never could content himself here probably it's best that he should go. I think every young man should have a chance in life, so long as it is an honest one," said Jack to Sneath.

"Yes. But your Uncle Dick told me that he knew Ralph was averse to work of any kind, and that he was likely to grow up utterly worthless. So he made his inheritance of one-half the farm here conditional upon his living here and working the place. He said he thought the lad would be out of the way of temptations here and beyond the reach of the bad companions he had in the town whence he came," answered Sneath.

"No doubt Uncle Dick had Ralph's welfare at heart as well as my own. I am sorry for Ralph, and I do hope that he will not turn out badly."

"I do, too. But I fear that here he had his last chance to make a useful, honest man of himself. And his conduct about the hidden money—his wish to keep it, though he knows it belongs to another—speaks badly for his principles. I fear that Ralph will never be just and honest," rejoined Sneath, and Jack saw that the old caretaker seemed to be really much grieved.

"You seem to take the matter to heart," he said.

"Yes, because I am always sorry to see a lad who is bright and who is offered a chance refuse to accept it and turn out badly," answered Sneath, gravely.

Jack assented and silence fell between them. Meanwhile, Ralph walked onward and he felt a sense of elation now that he had left Black Dale behind. He had proceeded for several miles and he was not far from the "Dog and the Gun" inn when he sat down by the roadside to rest. He presently heard footsteps in a dense woods that closely bordered the highway, in the rear of his position, and as he thought of the desperate men who had visited Black Dale, he crept into a thicket behind the tree. As luck would have it Ralph had barely concealed himself in the dense cover when two men whom he believed to be the outlaws who had led the attack on the farmhouse emerged from the woods at but a few paces from his hiding-place.

"Well, Bagger, here we are, back again in the neighborhood o' Black Dale," said one of the men.

"Yes, and I tell you, Hanson, this is to be our last trip to these parts. We'll take Midnight's treasure away with us this time or we'll make some new ghosts to keep Midnight's spook company at the lone farm," replied Bagger.

"I understand. You are yet convinced that old Sneath or Job, or both of them know where the money is, and you've brought our whole gang to make a final play for the treasure."

"Exactly. That's why I've had the gang make a camp in the depths of the woods. They are to lay low until I order the attack on Black Dale to be made. Now let's go on and spy around the farm to see how things are there," said Bagger.

With that the two rascals walked on along the highway in the direction of the lone farm.

Ralph had heard all, and when the two men had passed out of sight he came out into the road. His conscience told him that he ought to go back to Black Dale and warn his cousin. But it was a long walk to the farm that he had left and so, selfish enough, after a moment or so of hesitation, Ralph again started in the direction of the inn, beyond which lay his route to the nearest railway station.

In due time Ralph arrived at the railway station and, having the necessary money, he purchased a ticket to the town in which he had dwelt before he came to Black Dale. He had some little time to wait for the next train that was bound for his proposed destination, and as he walked up and down the station platform to while away the time, perhaps a premonition came to his mind, for all at once he paused in his walk and asked himself: "Am I making a mistake in leaving Black Dale after all? Will Jack become a successful farmer there while I trust to luck in getting more congenial employment in the town?"

A little later the train for which he waited arrived and very soon it was carrying him away, never again to return. Meanwhile, Bagger and Hanson were prowling about Black Dale like "shadows," as Job called them. At last they went away, undiscovered by Jack or the two companions, who now remained with him there. The night descended anon, but the lone trio at Black Dale received no warning that their foes were

near. Evidently desperate work would soon be attempted at the lone farm by the outlaws.

CHAPTER XIX.—Job's "House of Gold."

As previously stated, Job had discontinued his habitual night ramblings after Mattie had confided to Jack all about the remarks made by the demented lad, when he attempted to abduct the maid of the inn. But on the night of the day which witnessed the departure of Ralph from Black Dale, the half-wit had once more stolen out of the house while Jack and the old caretaker slept. The moon was shining brightly and it was just such a night as Job had formerly always selected for his nocturnal walks. On the present occasion he carried a rifle, and upon his shoulder was a bag which seemed to be pretty well filled with something, though its weight did not appear to incommode the big giant.

Nick, the canine-like tame wolf, followed at the heels of his strange master, and to the animal Job addressed some remarks, after he had entered the woods, which began at a point at no great distance north of the isolated farmhouse.

"We have fooled 'em all, Nick," said the lad, just as if he fancied his dumb pet understood and appreciated the remark. "Yes, we have fooled 'em all, and now they have given up watching Job o' nights, thinking that he no longer goes forth in the moonlight. I'm glad Ralph has left, for now there is one less to fool. They say Job is half-witted, but he is too smart for them."

The wolf whined as he put his paws on Job's shoulder, and tried to lick his face, as if that was his way of indicating that he quite approved of his works.

"Now, then," continued Job, as he pushed the wolf away gently, "we'll go to the house of gold, and have no fear of any one."

At length Job and his four-footed friend arrived at the foot of the rocky and well-wooded hill where Ralph had lost him more than once when he sought to track him. He began to ascend the elevation, and half way up the side of it he paused before a dense canopy of vines and creepers that hung from the edge of an overhanging ledge, like a curtain of vegetation which Nature's hand had adjusted there. Raising the dense tangle, he disclosed an open space that extended along beneath the ledge, and passing underneath the rocks he presently paused beside the sheer face of the seemingly impenetrable boulders which formed the base of the ledge. Then he deposited the bag upon the ground and, because the curtain of vegetation had fallen back in its place behind him, he was now in almost total darkness, so completely did the canopy of vines exclude the moonlight from the underledge recess.

But Job proceeded by the sense of feeling, which familiarity with the surroundings rendered certain, and after listening intently for a moment or so and hearing no sounds save those of Nature's voices, he pushed aside a great rock which was so heavy that no person not endowed with his great strength could have moved unaided. When the rock was out of place an opening some three feet high, but so narrow that there was barely room for his entrance, was dis-

closed. Through it Job passed and the wolf followed. Then the lad laid hold upon a heavy rope, which was knotted about a natural, knob-like projection in the side of the rock that he had removed. Bracing his feet against the side of the cave, he pulled steadily, putting forth all his strength in the effort, and thus he drew the rock back into its place, until it closed the hole through which he had come. This done, Job struck a match and lighted a candle, which he took from his pocket. As the wick burst into flame, and an increasing light gradually disclosed the strange interior, the rugged walls of a miniature cave were revealed. The roof was about six feet from the floor, and there was space enough for several persons to move about in comfort.

"Here we are in the house of gold that no one but Job knows of," muttered the demented lad, as he stuck the blazing candle in an empty bottle that stood in a little niche of the wall.

Then he opened the bag and took out a quantity of ready-cooked food, which he placed in a soap-box on the floor.

Nick, the wolf, watched this latter proceeding with special interest, and even manifested an inclination to help himself from the contents of the box when the food was in it. But Job spoke of the cave and showed no further disposition to meddle with the food.

"Now," said Job, seating himself on the couch of leaves and glancing about the strange interior approvingly, "the house of gold is all ready for the queen. Here is good, cool, fresh water always bubbling up in the spring. Here is food and a good couch to sleep on. And, above all, here is what makes Job a king—a gold king—such as men of great wealth are called. And all the yellow beauties shall be Job's gift to his queen."

Thus voicing his thoughts, the strange lad arose and passed to the rear wall. There he placed his hands upon a fragment of rock and, as it was only about two feet square and quite thin, he easily removed it, disclosing an opening into which he plunged both hands and drew out a heavy leather bag that was secured very much like an ordinary mail-bag, the confining strap being fastened with a heavy padlock. Job deposited the bag upon the cave floor and, kneeling beside it, with the wolf squatted near, he produced a key and in a moment he had the bag open. As he held the mouth of the bag open and looked into it he saw the glittering gold coin which it contained, for the light of the candle fell upon the contents.

Eagerly and with a miser's delight in the mere sense of possession, Job fingered the glittering yellow coins and, raising a handful, dropped them, one by one, into the bag, laughing in childish glee as he heard the musical clang of the striking coins that was to him the sweetest music.

"It is all safe. The great treasure will always be safe here. Always here for Job and his queen," he muttered, anon.

And at length, when he had amused himself by playing with the gold for some time, he relocked the treasure-bag and returned it to the hiding-place in the wall.

A moment later Job and his dumb companion were outside the cave, and the former had once more put the rock in place so that the mouth of the little cavern was completely closed. This

being done, Job and the wolf passed under the canopy of trailing vines and out from beneath the projecting ledge. There, in the brilliant moonlight, the ever alert and suspicious lad stood still for a moment or so, while he listened intently and looked about, casting keen and searching glances in every direction. Then, as if satisfied that he had no occasion to fear human observation, he set off swiftly down the hill and, of course, the wolf followed him.

Evidently Bagger did not mean to make his last final and desperate attempt to wrest the secret which he supposed the inmates of Black Dale farmhouse held from them that night, for on his way to that lonely dwelling Job saw nothing of the outlaws, nor did his singular and mysterious power of perception of the invisible appear to convey any knowledge of the presence in the vicinity of "the shadows."

CHAPTER XX.—Captain Midnight's Old Band.

The night passed without an alarm at Black Dale, and the new day dawned bright and beautiful. And while the inmates of the farmhouse bestirred themselves about the duties of the farm with no thought of the proximity of foes, an animated scene was in progress at the camp of the latter. In a secluded little valley of the great woods that extended north and west of Black Dale, Bagger and his men had made their camp. Three days previously they had come on different railway trains to the water-tank on the railway, which ran through this forest at a distance of eighteen or twenty miles from Black Dale. The two men remained in hiding beside the railway track, and as the several members of the band arrived by different trains, Bagger and Hanson were on hand to meet them, as soon as they gained the cover of the woods, and tell them how to proceed in order to reach the rendezvous. In this way all the members of the party were able to reach the selected camping place without going astray. On the morning of which we are now writing the outlaws kindled fires and boiled coffee and made merry over their breakfast, for there were many well-filled flasks among the party. The band numbered ten men, and desperate fellows they looked to be, as if looting a train or slitting a throat would be for them a most congenial occupation. Bagger and Hanson were eating their morning meal a little apart from the others, and as he looked the band over approvingly, the former remarked to Hanson, who was really second in command—Bagger being the chief, as already indicated:

"They are a pretty desperate crowd—my flock of lambs, and if it comes to that they can give the sheriff and his men a hot fight."

"Yes," assented Hanson, "but when do you mean to turn the trick at Black Dale?"

"Why, you know we have got to give the Casson Brothers time to draw the sheriff, constable and their posses out of the township in pursuit of them, so we can have things our own way at Black Dale, and no fear of the local officers."

"Yes, the Cassons are to run off some horses from the sheriff's own farm and lead the officers on a long chase. But what I want to know is when we are to strike?"

"Unless we hear from them to the contrary, we

may conclude the Cassons have succeeded in drawing the local officers away by tomorrow night. Therefore, unless we receive some message from the Cassons, we'll capture Black Dale farmhouse and all its inmates tomorrow night."

Presently, when a period of silence had ensued between him and Hanson, the latter remarked:

"Anyhow, we have the best right to the treasure, for we are all members of Captain Midnight's old band."

"Yes, and each one of us was with him when he held up the railway train from which he took the gold," assented Bagger.

"Certainly."

"In fact, we made it possible for Midnight to secure the treasure. We risked our lives and our liberty by holding up the train, and Midnight was oath-bound to share the plunder with us, but he went back on his oath and on us, and made off with all the gold. But for that hot-headed Miggs, who killed Midnight when we raided Black Dale first, when our old chief was in hiding there, we might have tortured him until he told us where to find the plunder," said Bagger.

The morning advanced until the last mist of the night had risen from the forest, and then Bagger and Hanson went out on a scout, merely to assure themselves that the people at Black Dale yet remained unsuspicious of the near proximity of the danger that threatened them. They proceeded to the confines of the great woods and paused in the shadows of the trees at a point where they could command a view of the lone farm. Much to their satisfaction they saw Jack, Sneath and Job at work in a field not far distant; and as, of course, they did not know that Ralph had left the farm they supposed he was somewhere about. The observations of the two outlaws served to convince them that the people of the farm were yet unsuspicious, and that they had evidently, by long immunity from molestation, come to feel pretty secure at their isolated habitation.

So Bagger and Hanson returned to their camp, feeling exultant and well satisfied. They reported to their comrades, and all hands were pleased and hopeful of success. But some of the men were a trifle impatient at delay.

CHAPTER XXI.—Mattie In the Cave of the Hidden Treasure.

Evidently if no hitch occurred in Bagger's plans, the occupants of Black Dale farm were certain to be placed in the greatest danger and probably they would be captured by the outlaws. And it appeared that there was little chance that the news of the presence of the lawless band in the vicinity would reach Jack and his companions in time for them to flee from the threatened farm or secure help to assist them in defending the place against their foes.

On the afternoon of the day of which we have just written, Jack was, as usual, at work with Sneath and Job in a field at no great distance from the house. As the hours passed and the sun gradually descended in the western sky, if the companions of the demented lad had observed him closely they might have noted that he seemed to

be uneasy, and that he watched the declining orb of day with singular attention, as if he was timing himself by it. And occasionally an impatient word or two fell from his lips, but his fellow-workers were not near enough to hear. At length the strange lad said to himself:

"Now, it's about four o'clock. I know it, for the shadow of the big birch tree has begun to lengthen, so it's time for Job to go. He won't take Nick with him this time, for he might frighten Mattie before Job got close to her."

Thus muttering, the cunning though demented youth stole away. And he swiftly gained the grove at the side of the field. The tame wolf had been following him in the field as he worked there, and it was close at his heels when he entered the grove. Looking back as he passed under the trees, he saw that evidently Jack and Sneath had not noted his departure.

A few moments later he arrived at the farmhouse. There he paused long enough to chain the wolf to his little house in the yard. After that he proceeded toward Krugg's farm at a swift pace and he went by the way of the lonely bridle-path. As he proceeded Job talked to himself, as was his habit. And he smiled in evident exultant anticipation as he presently muttered:

"Job knows that Mattie goes to bring the cows from the woods pasture every evening. Job will be in hiding there when she comes tonight."

From this it appeared that the lad had planned to abduct Mattie that evening, and we have already seen how he had prepared the cave, which he called his "house of gold," for the reception of the young girl. He had become so thoroughly imbued with the idea that he must carry Mattie off in order to make sure that Jack did not entirely estrange her from him, that he took no thought of the consequences of his deed, and his clouded mind was incapable of considering what difficulties he might encounter in keeping Mattie a captive.

Like all persons of unsound mind, with one idea dominant, he thought only of executing his plan, and did not weigh the results which the future might bring forth. And so eager was he for the consummation of his mad project that he made the journey to Krugg's farm in a remarkably quick time, and without once pausing on the way. The unfrequented bridle-path was, as usual, deserted when he passed along it, and when he finally arrived at the confines of Krugg's farm he was sure that no one had observed him going in that direction. Pausing at the edge of the timber through which the bridle-path had conducted him, he looked over the open fields beyond. In the distance he saw the roof of the "Dog and Gun" among the treetops, with the rays of the declining sun falling upon it. Near his position was a great field of pasture land, in which there were many clumps of trees and bushes, and among them he saw the small herd of cows that belonged to Krugg's farm grazing peacefully. It was true that Mattie performed the duties of dairymaid at the farm and that she usually went to bring the cows from the pasture to the farmyard, where they were milked morning and evening. But an inspection of the pasture assured Job that as yet Mattie had not come to drive the cows to the farm-yard, and he presently ad-

vanced to clump of trees near which the cattle were feeding. He secreted himself among the bushes that grew there and set in to watch and wait for the coming of the maid of the inn. And all the time his watchful eyes were turned in the direction of the inn as he peered through the branches about him. Some time elapsed ere his vigilant watch was rewarded, but at last he saw something blue and white moving among the trees in the distance, and then Mattie came in sight, clad in a pretty blue and white calico gown and wearing a sun-bonnet made of the same material. Job's eyes flashed and he smiled with satisfaction, but he did not move from his hiding-place then. Mattie continued to advance, but he wished that she would move more rapidly, and he could scarcely restrain his impatience when she paused to gather some wild flowers. But finally Mattie drew near his place of concealment. Then Job suddenly sprang from the cover. At the sight of him the startled girl uttered an alarmed cry, and, obeying the natural impulse of the moment, she started to run in the direction of the inn. But in a moment Job overtook her and grasped her by the arm.

For a moment she was speechless. Then she began to entreat Job to let her go, but she exhausted all her powers of persuasion in vain. He was obdurate and even her tears failed to move him from his purpose. He had set his heart upon carrying her off. Nothing that she could say availed to shake his determination in the least. And so he led her away until in desperation she refused to walk further. Then he raised her in his strong arms and carried her with apparent ease. He traversed the bridle-path until he came near Black Dale. Then he made a detour through the woods, so as to avoid the farm, and finally came to the wooded hill in which was his cave. Having removed the rock that guarded the entrance while he yet kept hold of Mattie with one hand, he led her inside. Then he replaced the stone and lighted the candle which he had left in the cave. Mattie sank down on the rocky floor, moaning.

"I shall die if you shut me up here in this gloomy cave. Oh, Job, how can you be so cruel as to imprison me here, away from the bright sunlight, the birds and flowers and everything I love," she said, tearfully.

"But Job will give you the treasure—the yellow beauties—the things that all men work and suffer for all their lives. You shall be a gold queen. That will pay you for staying here a while, and when they have ceased to look for you you and Job will take all the gold and go far away and buy everything you want. All the nice things in the world shall be yours," answered the demented lad.

Then he produced the bag of gold and showed Mattie its contents, and so she came at last to the certain knowledge that Job did indeed have the treasure that Captain Midnight had secreted.

But presently Job put the bag of gold back in its hiding-place and, having shown Mattie the food in the box and a quantity of candles, and also the spring of fresh water, despite her frantic entreaties to be allowed to leave the cave with him, he went away alone and placed the rock, which she could not move, in the entrance.

CHAPTER XXII.—Jack Makes an Alarming Discovery.

Left alone in the cave, Mattie at first made attempts to remove the great rock that barred her way to the other world, but at last, convinced that her strength was no equal to the task, she discontinued her unavailing efforts.

While Mattie remained in the cave, tortured by fears of the future, Jack returned to Black Dale farm and rejoined his fellow-workers at the house, for it was now after sunset and Jack and Sneath had completed their day's work. Of course they missed Job from the field soon after he left it, and when he came to the house Jack asked:

"What made you leave your work so suddenly, Job, and where have you been?"

"Job went to hunt some fine butterflies that he saw at the edge of the grove, and they led him a long chase and he did not get them after all," answered the lad, innocently enough, and Jack said no more about it.

That evening after dark, as the inmates of the lone farmhouse were about to retire for the night, they heard the clatter of hoofs on the drive, and as Jack opened the door, Isaac Krugg and his farm-hand rode up, mounted on a couple of the landlord's horses. The lad saluted them and Krugg said, in anxious and excited tones:

"Have you seen anything of Mattie this afternoon?"

"Why, no; why do you ask?" replied Jack instantly becoming apprehensive that some harm had befallen his girlish sweetheart.

"Well, Mattie are gone an' we can't think what has happened to her. We are nigh scared to death about the gal. She left the inn at the usual time this afternoon to go to the pasture to bring the cows to the farm-yard, as she allus does. But she didn't come back, and we's searched all over the farm for her in vain," continued Krugg.

And as he spoke the almost certain conviction flashed upon Jack's mind that Job had abducted Mattie. He reflected for a moment and decided that it would do no good to tell Krugg of his suspicions, for he was aware that the landlord was a hasty man, and that no doubt he would openly accuse Job, and so put the demented lad on his guard.

"I am alarmed and more anxious than I can tell on Mattie's account, and if I can assist in the search for her I will gladly do so," he said.

Meanwhile Sneath and Job had come to the door and they heard all.

Sneath expressed the hope that Mattie might have gone to the house of some distant neighbor, but he could not advance any theory in support of this supposition. Krugg said that he and his men would visit the nearest neighbors, but that he could imagine no reason why Mattie should have gone to visit any of them without saying a word about it, when she had set out on a different errand. She had never done such a thing before, he declared, and he did not believe she had done so now. He said that he would call at Black Dale again in the morning if he did not find Mattie during the night. With that Krugg rode away, followed by his men. And ahead Jack had found much in the occurrences of the day to con-

firm his suspicions of Job. The demented boy was sent to the barn on an errand by Sneath as soon as Krugg and his companions had gone. When Job had passed out of the house Jack said to the old caretaker:

"I believe Job has abducted Mattie. He was absent from about four o'clock until after dark. He could have gone to Krugg's farm and back, with an hour to spare, I should say, during the time he was away."

"I share your suspicions," replied Sneath.

Jack then reverted to Job's previous attempt to carry off the young girl and in conclusion he asked:

"How shall we induce Job to tell us the truth? Granted that he had abducted Mattie, how shall we find her?"

"I do not think that we can make Job acknowledge the truth if he is guilty, and I cannot imagine where he has taken the girl. But certainly he must have taken her to some place from which she cannot escape. Ha! I have a thought! He may have shut her up in the deserted cabin of the lumbermen."

"That is possible, of course, but somehow I do not believe it. I think in dealing with Job we must try to match cunning with cunning. Now, this is what I propose: We will not seem to suspect Job, and, telling him to stay here to guard the house, we will leave, saying we are going to search for Mattie. Then, while you go on alone to the deserted cabin in the clearing, I'll remain hidden near the house. I've an idea that when he thinks we are gone he'll go to the place to which he has taken Mattie. If he leaves the house I'll follow him, doing my best to track him without being discovered."

"That's a shrewd plan and we'll try it," said Sneath.

Job presently re-entered the house and Jack immediately put his plan into operation. He and Sneath left the house, telling the demented lad that they were going to look for Mattie, and Sneath directed him to remain to guard the house.

After leaving the house Sneath and Jack walked away in company until they were in the adjacent woods. Then, while the caretaker proceeded in the direction of the deserted cabin, the lad retraced his steps to the edge of the woods. The moon was now up, and as Jack halted he could command a clear view of the farm-house.

For a long time Jack watched the dwelling, but Job did not come forth. At last Jack heard approaching footsteps and, looking in the rear, he saw Sneath coming alone, so the lad knew he had not found Mattie. Sneath joined Jack in a moment and said that he had found the cabin in the clearing empty. Then they went to the house and Job met them at the door and inquired, in anxious tones, if they had found any trace of Mattie. When he was informed of the failure of their quest the lad feigned the utmost solicitude and said that on the morrow he would search the whole neighborhood. The night passed and Jack did not sleep, but on the contrary, he was alert and watchful to detect Job if he left the house. But the demented boy did not do so. He was far too cunning for that, and, truth to say, he fancied that he was under suspicion. On the morrow, at an early hour, Job left the house, saying he meant to search all day for Mattie, if he did not

find her sooner. Jack let Job get a little start. Then he glided after him, keeping behind bush-grown fences and hedges. In the woods he continued to trail Job, dodging from tree to tree. The crafty half-wit knew, however, that he was followed by Jack, and he said to himself:

"I'll roam the woods all day and so make him think his suspicions of Job are wrong."

The demented lad followed out this plan and, constantly keeping him in sight, Jack stuck to his trail. Along about three o'clock in the afternoon Jack saw Job pause abruptly at the top of a wooded elevation that he had reached and suddenly sink down in the bushes, as if to hide from some one whom he had discovered in advance of his position. Creeping forward cautiously, Jack gained the top of the elevation at some little distance from Job and peered into the valley below. There, in a natural clearing or interglade, he saw a band of ten men lounging about near the blackened embers of a couple of burnt-out camp-fires. The succeeding moment Jack recognized two members of the party. They were Bagger and Hanson. At once Jack knew that the band of outlaws had no doubt returned in force to the vicinity of Black Dale to make the final desperate attempt to secure the hidden treasure that Mattie had told him Bagger had vowed to make when he came again.

For a time Jack forgot all about Job, and when at length his thoughts reverted to him and he crept to the place where he had last seen him, he failed to find him. The truth was, Job had stolen away while Jack was watching the outlaws. The latter now thought that he should make no delay, but hasten to the farm-house and warn Sneath of his alarming discovery, and he at once set out for Black Dale.

CHAPTER XXIII.—Poor Job's Cruel Fate.

When Jack arrived at the farm-house he found Sneath there, and before the lad could tell of his discovery of the outlaws, the caretaker hastened to say:

"Krugg was just here and he says that he has not yet found any trace of Mattie; that she has not been seen at any farm-house in the neighborhood."

Then Jack told him that he had followed Job, and he made known how he had discovered Bagger and his men in the woods. Of course Sneath was much surprised and alarmed.

"We must be prepared for an attack tonight. We must get help before night comes. I forgot to mention that Krugg brought the news that last night a couple of notorious horse-thieves, called the Casson Brothers, were captured by Sheriff Robinson and his farm-hands as the thieves were attempting to run off some of the sheriff's horses. The sheriff suspected the rascals might have confederates in the neighborhood and he has sent out word for a posse to assemble at his house. If you will ride to the sheriff's farm you may get there in time to bring him and his men here before they set out to look for confederates of the horse-thieves. Now I think of it, the rascals may be in league with Bagger and his gang," said Sneath.

"Yes, yes, I'll be off at once. But first tell me, has Job returned?" cried Jack.

"No, I've seen nothing of him since you followed him away into the woods this morning."

"I lost Job while I was watching the outlaws," said Jack, as he hastened from the house. Sneath followed, and they proceeded to the stable. As Jack saddled and bridled old Dobbin he continued:

"In the woods Job acted as if he really was searching for Mattie. But after he eluded me he may have gone to the place where he secreted her."

With that, Jack mounted and galloped away. Meanwhile, when Job eluded Jack at the elevation where the two lads discovered the secluded camp of Bagger's band, the demented youth glided away for some distance. Then he secreted himself in a thicket. From that cover he watched Jack until he saw him set out swiftly in the direction of Black Dale.

"Good!" Job then exclaimed. "Now he's gone to tell Sneath about the shadows and so Job can safely venture to go to his house of gold."

As soon as Jack had passed out of sight the half-wit set out for the cave under the ledge. It was a couple of hours later when he arrived there, about five o'clock. Job removed the stone from the mouth of the cave and entered. The interior was lighted by a candle, for Mattie had kept one burning all the time since Job left her there alone. She was seated on the couch of leaves, and as Job entered she sprang to her feet.

"Oh, tell me that you have come to take me away! Oh, let me go! If you keep me here longer I shall always hate you! I shall go crazy if I am long imprisoned in this gloomy place," she cried.

"Job dare not let you go now—not even if he wanted to, because you have seen his yellow beauties," answered the demented lad, but he looked sad and troubled. Truth to say, the sight of Mattie's now pale and haggard face worried the lad and he muttered:

"What would Job do if she were to sicken here?" but this Mattie did not hear.

Job remained in the cave for some time talking wildly of what he and Mattie would do with the hidden gold at some future time. Finally he said he would go. Meanwhile, Mattie had decided to make a desperate last attempt at escape. Stealthily she took up a piece of rock from the cave floor, and as Job pushed the great stone out of the cave mouth she crept up behind him and, as much as she regretted the necessity for such a deed, she nerved herself for the effort, and suddenly brought the rock which she clutched down upon his head with great force. Job fell to the cave floor, uttering a groan and, leaping over his prostrate form, Mattie darted out of the cave and through the vines that hung before the ledge.

Through the dark woods she ran, without pausing, for some time, and she thought only of placing as great distance as possible between herself and Job. But at length, when she had gone for a long distance and yet failed to reach the cleared fields of Black Dale, she came to a halt from sheer exhaustion. Panting and almost breathless she stood there listening, but she heard no sound of pursuit. Then as she reflected, the terrible fear took hold upon her that she was lost

—lost in the great woods. But as soon as she somewhat regained her breath, she hastened onward again. Once more fatigue soon compelled her to halt, and as she again listened she distinctly heard swift footsteps in the rear. The belief that untoward chance had directed Job, so that he now threatened to overtake her, inspired her with false strength, and she again struggled on. But she heard her pursuer drawing nearer each moment. And while she fled the clouds had been drifting southward, anon they were dispelled from the face of the moon and presently its silvery light flooded the woods. Mattie looked back and saw Job. At the same time he discovered her. As she saw the lad she sprang into a clump of bushes. Glancing back she saw Job in an open glade, and while she looked a file of ten men appeared at the end of the open. She had barely time to recognize Bagger, who was at the head of the party, when Job discovered the men and, wheeling instantly, started to run. Then Bagger shouted:

"The half-wit must not escape or he'll give the alarm at Black Dale. He's fleet as a deer. I'll stop him with a bullet through the leg."

The next instant Bagger's rifle exploded and Job fell uttering one awful cry. Mattie saw Bagger dash forward to the fallen lad, who had stumbled just before the outlaw pressed the trigger. For a moment Bagger examined Job. Then the ruffian uttered a frightful oath and exclaimed:

"My bullet went through his heart! But it was his own fault, for he stumbled as I fired. This is bad luck. If he alone holds the secret of Midnight's treasure now we may never discover it. But, come on, men. This can't be helped. We must get to Black Dale without delay."

Mattie was filled with horror at the fate of poor Job, but as the band of outlaws moved away she determined to stealthily follow them. Evidently they knew the way to Black Dale, and she resolved that they should unwittingly guide her there. As Bagger and his men moved swiftly through the woods the lost girl glided after them, and she realized that because of the brilliant moonlight she was in great danger of being discovered.

As the outlaws proceeded swiftly and without halting it was not very long before they arrived at the edge of Black Dale farm. In the woods, at the side of the open fields, they halted and Mattie saw, as she looked forward, that no light was visible in the windows of the farm-house.

Everything—the darkness, the peaceful quietude—indicated that the occupants of the lone dwelling had retired for the night.

"Oh, if I do not warn them they will be surprised by the robbers," said Mattie, under her breath, and then she glided away and presently crept out of the woods and along a bush-grown fence that ran toward the house. While the outlaws yet remained in the woods the devoted girl pressed on, hidden from their sight by the fence and the bushes, and at last she reached the house undetected by the enemy.

CHAPTER XXIV.—Conclusion.

We left Jack galloping away toward the farm of Sheriff Robinson, which was some seven miles distant from Black Dale. Inspired by the urgen-

cy of his mission, the lad did not spare his horse, but kept him at the best speed which the animal was capable of maintaining.

"Oh, if I can only reach the sheriff's farm before he and his men leave it I may bring them to Black Dale in time to set an ambush for the robbers before they arrive there," he reflected.

And he believed that if he could only succeed in doing this the capture of the outlaws might be assured. Then he might hope to live in peace at Black Dale. But while this thought occupied his mind to some extent he was consumed with anxiety on Mattie's account, and more than once he said to himself:

"I would give all of Captain Midnight's treasure, were it mine to give, and sacrifice everything to gain the assurance of Mattie's safety."

On the way to the sheriff's farm Jack met with no adventure, and in due time he arrived there, and he rode up to the house just as Sheriff Robinson and a posse of twenty farmers whom he had assembled were mounting their horses preparatory to setting out to search for possible confederates of the captured horse-thieves.

In a few hasty words Jack made known the object of his coming, and when the sheriff and his men understood that the band of outlaws were near Black Dale and evidently intended to make an attack there during the night, they were well pleased, for they felt confident of capturing the desperadoes.

"Come on, men. We'll hasten to Black Dale and there set a trap for the rescals," said the sheriff.

In a moment the party was on the way, and they rode swiftly, led by Jack. They reached Black Dale some time before the outlaws, with Mattie on their trail, arrived at the edge of the woods, where the cleared fields of the farm began. A short consultation was held with Sneath and then the ambush was set. When the party had concealed their horses in a grove at some distance from the house, they deployed about it, crouching behind trees and bushes and were ready to close in on the outlaws when they approached the house.

Jack remained with the outside party, and the plan was to let the outlaws charge up to the house, in which all was silence and darkness. Then the concealed men were to close in on the band from the rear. All at once, when every one was ready for the coming of the outlaws, Jack, who was crouching behind a bush-grown fence, saw a slender, girlish figure approaching along it, and the next instant Mattie was in his arms. It was a joyful moment for them both, but Mattie hastened to tell Jack of the approach of the outlaws, and in a few words hastily acquaint him with her adventures from the time she was abducted by Job. In conclusion she made known how Job had been shot and killed in the woods.

Then, with her, Jack glided to the house. Sneath opened the door at a word of explanation from the lad and Mattie entered. Then Jack returned to his former position. Only a few moments later the outlaws quietly approached and surrounded the house. Then Bagger knocked loudly upon the rear door with the butt of his pistol. Sneath answered, demanding to know who was there.

"I'm Bagger, and I am here with ten men to

capture you and all with you. Surrender peacefully or it will be the worse for you," answered the leader of the outlaws.

While he was speaking the sheriff and his men stealthily closed in about the house in a circle. Suddenly the officer shouted:

"Surrender, you villains! We have you surrounded!"

"Don't surrender! Blaze away at them and then every man for himself!" yelled Bagger, as he discharged his rifle and bounded away, followed by Hanson.

But the two leaders were dropped by bullets from the rifles of Jack and the sheriff before they had gone many paces. The others threw down their weapons and they were at once placed under guard. It was then found that Bagger and Hanson had each received a bullet in the leg. Among the posse was a country doctor, who attended to the wounded outlaws. They were placed in a farm wagon and driven away to the county jail, while the other prisoners were marched to the same destination. At daylight all were safe behind prison bars, and it may be added that they were ultimately tried, convicted and sentenced to long terms of imprisonment.

When Mattie told Jack how Job had abducted her she did not tell him about the hidden treasure. That great news she reserved for an agreeable surprise. But when the sheriff and his men had gone with their prisoners, Mattie told Jack and Sneath that Captain Midnight's long-hidden treasure was hidden in Job's cave.

Great was the rejoicing of the boy at this news. And the old caretaker seemed even more delighted than the lad. Early in the morning, led by Mattie, Jack and Sneath found the cave, for Mattie remembered some of the landmarks on the way to the ledge and Sneath knew its location. In the hiding-place in the cave they found the bag of gold and they took it to the farm-house. Then Sneath said:

"Now, Jack, I have a surprising revelation to make. You remember that your Uncle Dick won a fortune in the California gold-fields and that you heard he had lost that fortune. Very well. That was all quite true. Your Uncle Dick converted his gold into coin and shipped it East by express. The train was robbed and all your uncle's gold was secured by Captain Midnight. When I told you the story of Dix, the miner, and said it was his gold that the train-robbers stole and secreted at Black Dale, I was really telling you the story of your Uncle Dick. When I said that Dix meant that his fortune should keep the children of his sister, I meant you and Ralph. The truth is, my dear boy, I am your Uncle Dick and the hidden treasure that we have recovered belongs to me."

The old man paused, and as Jack was too much astonished to speak, he continued:

"I had a two-fold object in view in my deception. In the first place, after I had tracked Midnight to Black Dale and bought the place, after the death of the train-robber, I learned that Bagger and the other members of his band had also located Black Dale as the place where Midnight had probably hidden the stolen gold and that, knowing I was here, they concluded I was after the money and had sworn to murder me, for they knew I had taken an oath never to rest until I

had found my stolen fortune. So, to guard my life, I went away and had it reported that I had died in a hospital, as you believed. Then, in disguise, I came back here and assumed the name of Sneath. My purpose in deceiving you was to test you and Ralph. I wished to be sure that you were worthy of assistance. I thought that I would like to have you with me here on the farm and that I could then satisfy myself about you both. I had heard that Ralph was shiftless and wild, and I determined that here I would give him his last chance to do better, and if he proved worthy I would make him joint heir of my fortune with you, in the end. I had previously heard such good reports of you that I was sure you would not disappoint me. I am sorry for Ralph, but he has only himself to blame. Now, when I am done with it, you shall inherit the hidden fortune. And now, behold your Uncle Dick as he really is."

With that the speaker removed a wig and a false beard, which he had worn for so long in the character of the old caretaker, and Jack then saw that he bore a striking resemblance to his own deceased mother. The lad embraced his uncle warmly and thanked him, with much emotion.

* * * * *

A little later Jack drove over to Krugg's inn with Mattie and she was joyfully welcomed by the landlord and his wife. Jack and his uncle went to the county town that same day and deposited the recovered fortune in the bank there. A few days later they left Black Dale, which Jack's uncle sold to Krugg. The old miner went with Jack to reside in a distant city, where Jack attended a business college until he graduated. Then his uncle set him up in business as a merchant, and the same year Mattie became his happy bride, and a successful career seemed assured to him.

Ralph finally drifted away to the far West, and Jack and his uncle lost track of him. But the kindly old man often said that he hoped some day Ralph would develop into an honest and worthy man. But some years subsequently the news came that Ralph had been killed in a saloon row at a mining camp.

Uncle Dick made his home with Jack and Mattie until he, too, passed away, and he was never tired of telling the exciting story of his quest for his stolen fortune and his thrilling adventures at Black Dale.

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AL, THE ATHLETE, OR, THE CHAMPION OF THE CLUB

By R. T. BENNETT

(A Serial Story)

CHAPTER IV.—(Continued.)

"I ain't kicking," laughed Nelson. "And, to tell you the truth, Al, I think every one of the fellows are satisfied with the change, for you seem to have put every man in the very position which he has always had a longing to fill. I'll bet we will play better in the places each of us wished to hold down. What do you say, fellows?"

Without a single exception the boys all agreed to this, and a smile stole over Al's face as he said:

"Well, we can play a practice game and see how the new arrangement works. We will use the same subs we had on the bench before."

All the boys went to their places, and several of the substitutes were called out of the gym to do the batting for them.

It did not take Al five minutes to see that the change had made a wonderful improvement in the nine.

"A fellow can always do best what he takes the most interest in," reflected Al, as he saw how well his men were doing.

He had to coach them some, of course, and when the practice game was over he called them all together and said, in earnest tones:

"We have got to work hard now if we intend to beat the Mercurys on Saturday, for they are all fine players, and as they have plenty of money they have a professional coach at them all the time."

"What do you expect of us?" asked Nick.

"Two practice games a day before the match."

"Hard work!" growled Burt, ruefully.

"Can't help it. Any fellow who don't wish to do it had better say so now, so I can fill his place from the ranks of the subs."

This threat had its effect; not a boy objected. Seeing that there was not going to be any trouble, Al said:

"Meet here at two this afternoon. All dismissed."

The boys strolled away, leaving Nick with Al.

"It's a matter of pride with them," laughed Marsh. "They hate the Mercury snobs like fury, and every fellow will work himself half to death to put himself in trim to beat that bunch."

"I hope so," said Al.

"What ails you to-day? You look awfully blue."

"Read this letter," answered Al handing over the banker's peculiar note. "Can you throw any light on this thing?"

Nick read the letter carefully.

Then he handed it back and answered:

"Haven't you heard how the banker was robbed?"

"No. Will you clear up the mystery?"

"I'll try. The local paper had a full account of the matter. It seems that on the night you went

home with Jennie Harlow from the show at the opera house some crook broke into the banker's house and stole some money and jewelry from the old gentleman's bedrom."

"That was Tuesday night."

"Exactly, Jim Drew claims to have seen the thief."

"And I was the last person seen leaving the house?" hinted Al.

"Probably Drew saw you."

"And on that account suspicion has fallen on me?"

"It's all rot to say so, but the banker may think that."

"His letter seems to indicate such a thought."

"If he accuses you, lay him out and quit calling there."

"Well, I hope he will not have such a low idea of my honesty."

The two boys remained together all that day, and only separated when Al went home to prepare for his call at the banker's residence.

At eight o'clock the boy went up the grassy slope of Sunset Hill, and making his way through the elegantly laid-out grounds of Mr. Harlow's big estate, he approached the huge mansion in an uneasy frame of mind.

A servant admitted him to the library, where the stout, white-bearded owner of the place sat in an armchair, near the center-table, reading the evening paper beside a drop-light.

The banker glanced up at the young athlete in a searching manner, gave Adams a cold bow, and said:

"Good-evening. Came in answer to my note, eh?"

"Yes, sir," replied the boy, respectfully.

"Be seated, please," and he pointed to a chair.

Al sat down, and looking the old gentleman squarely in the eye, asked:

"What did you mean by your letter, Mr. Harlow?"

"I presume that you know that my house was robbed?"

"I did not know it until I was told today by a friend of mine, sir."

"Indeed! It was in the paper and is common gossip in Midwood. The robber got away with about five thousand dollars' worth of jewelry and in the neighborhood of two hundred dollars in banknotes."

"I am very sorry for your loss, sir."

"I have got a detective looking for the criminal."

"Has he discovered who robbed you?"

"He has found a young man who claims to have seen the thief steal out of this house," answered the banker, significantly.

"Then there is some hope of arresting the crook and getting back your money and jewelry, I presume?"

"Some. I will introduce you to the officer."

He touched a hand-bell on the table, and a thin, wiry little man, with a foxy face and a cropped head, glided into the room from the adjoining apartment and stood keenly watching the boy.

"This is detective Fox—Mr. Adams," said the banker.

Al bowed, and the detective bobbed his head without saying a word.

"Officer," said the banker, in his cold, measured way, "this is the boy."

"Yes, I know. I've been shadowing him all day," answered the detective in low, oily tones. "Surprised?" he added, turning to Al.

"Must say I am," assented Adams. "Why should you watch me?"

"To see if you showed signs of having an unusual amount of money to spend," chuckled the officer. "My work was useless, however."

A deathly pallor overspread Al's face, and he demanded, spiritedly:

"Am I accused of being the thief who robbed Mr. Harlow?"

"You are," answered the old gentleman.

"Who dares to say such a thing about me, sir?"

"I'll show you," and again he tapped the bell.

Jim Drew stepped from behind one of the portiers with a nasty, sneering smile on his sallow face, and turning upon Al, he hissed:

"I accuse you!"

"Liar!" exclaimed the young athlete, vehemently.

"Gentlemen," gritted Drew, pointing to our hero, "there is the thief! I saw him leaving this house with his booty."

"Will you swear to that in court?" demanded Mr. Harlow, sternly.

"I will."

"Adams, what have you got to say for yourself?"

"I deny this liar's charge, sir," answered the boy, restraining the fury that was boiling within him. "I was at the opera house with your daughter the night before last, and we arrived here at eleven o'clock. I left her at the front door and made my way straight home. If this young scoundrel saw me leaving this house it was at the time I have mentioned."

"It was after one in the morning," asserted Drew. "I happened to come in on a late train from New York, and was on my way home from the station. While passing this place I saw Adams sneaking stealthily out of the garden, and reaching the road, he passed me. I asked him what he was doing in your place at such a late hour. But instead of answering he took to his heels and ran away at the top of his speed."

"Liar again!" fairly shouted the astonished boy, indignantly.

"That's my evidence," declared Drew, paying no attention to what Al said. "Arrest him, and I will gladly swear to it in court. It is about time that this two-faced crook was unmasked and brought to justice."

Utterly unable to stand any more of the rascal's lies, Al sprang at his enemy, and doubling up his fist, he gave Drew a blow squarely between the eyes that knocked him down on the floor.

A yell of pain and rage escaped him.

Mr. Harlow sprang to his feet excitedly, and the detective rushed toward the falsely accused boy, shouting:

"Stop! Stop, or I'll put the handcuffs on you!"

"He lied infamously!" panted Al, hotly. "He is scheming to disgrace me in this household. He hates me, and he is taking a villain's revenge."

"You are under arrest," cried the detective. "I'll lock you up."

At that moment the hall door flew open and Jennie Harlow rushed into the room, followed by the boy Al had saved from the tramps.

"Hold!" exclaimed the excited girl. "I have something to say about this matter. I know the real thief, and there he stands!"

She was pointing squarely at Jim Drew.

There was a look of the most intense amazement upon George Harlow's face when his pretty little daughter made that unexpected accusation against Jim Drew.

The detective had laid a firm grip on Al's collar, but he shot a swift glance at Drew, who still laid on the floor where Al had knocked him, and he saw the young rascal turn as pale as death.

The young athlete folded his arms across his breast, and fastening a searching look upon Jennie, he exclaimed:

"Have you heard the lying charge that cur made against me?"

"Yes, I did," she answered, excitedly, "and I know it is false!"

"What proof have you, Miss Harlow?" asked the detective.

"The evidence of my own eyesight and the word of this little boy."

The old banker was intensely excited, and he now demanded, sternly:

"Why don't you come out with your evidence, Jennie?"

"Papa, you are cruelly wronging Al Adams with your unjust suspicion of his honesty," said Jennie in earnest tones. "When he brought me home I sat at my window and saw him go straight home. I was very wakeful, and sat up until long after two o'clock. Had he approached the house I surely would have seen him leave his own home to do it. If that is not enough——"

"Enough!" cried Mr. Harlow, ringingly. "Of course it is enough to satisfy me, for I never knew you to tell a falsehood in your life; but you have accused young Drew of the deed, and I want you to tell us why you have done so."

Jennie pointed at little Bud Roy.

"He will tell you what he just told me," said she, "and you can then judge for yourself whether Drew is the guilty party or not."

The detective let go of Al's collar at a motion from the banker, and turning to the waif, he asked in his oiliest manner:

"Why do you say that the young man lying on the floor is the one who broke into this house and stole the money and jewelry?"

"I can't say that he is the thief," said Bud, hesitatingly, "but I do know that I saw that fellow coming out of this house the night before last, when I was going by with Scotty, the tramp."

A look of alarm began to overspread Jim's face.

He scrambled to his feet and forgetting his rage at Al for an instant, he shook his fist at the little fellow excitedly and roared:

"You young whelp! How dare you——"

"Silence, sir!" interposed Mr. Harlow in angry tones.

"But——"

"Not another word!"

"Go on, Bud!" said the detective, with a crafty look.

(To be continued.).

PLUCK AND LUCK

NEW YORK, APRIL 20, 1927

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INTERESTING ARTICLES

MILK FOR CHILDREN

At least a quart of milk a day is necessary to assure complete development of children up to the age of thirteen.

This was the finding of the committee on nutritional problems of the American Public Health Association, composed of H. C. Sherman, chairman.

YOUNGEST CHURCH ORGANIST

The youngest church organist in America lives in Lewiston, Maine, thirteen-year-old Charles E. Berlanger, son of J. O. Berlanger organist at St. Mary's Church.

The boy has been playing for low mass every Sunday for several years. Occasionally he plays at high mass, while his father directs the choir of sixty-five voices.

COIN WORTH \$300

A dime, dated 1783, one of the rarest of old American coins, was unearthed from a lot in Sparta, N. J., by Alice H. Padgett, eighteen. The girl was playing in the lot adjoining the school she attended when she came upon the coin, which she at first thought was an ordinary cent.

Examining it more closely, she took it home and showed it to her father, Joseph Padgett, who consulted a numismatist. The coin is said to have a sale value of \$300.

TO SEARCH FOR BOAT LADEN WITH WHISKY

Enthusiasm has filled people of this community in Missouri Valley, Iowa, following reports that a river boat laden with whisky sank near here years ago.

The story goes that a steamboat carrying a heavy cargo of choice whiskeys, brandies and wines went down during a storm. The river now flows ten miles west of here and the old bed of the Big Muddy is now a cornfield. But somewhere under the corn is said to be the hulk of this old boat with what would now be a cargo as precious as gold.

GOOD OR NAUGHTY GIRLS?

Do "good" girls or "naughty" girls prove best when they go out into the world?

This question was raised when a group of professional women—members of the Soroptomist Club—met to discuss the modern educational system. Miss Gordon Holmes supported the good girl.

"I always go for the good girls," she declared, "and they are not taken much notice of these days. It is the naughty, difficult girls with whom you can do nothing who seem to get all the attention."

Miss Wallace did not agree with Miss Holmes. She thought the naughty, difficult girl was the one who, in later life, would make good. The naughty girl showed plenty of spirit and grit.

LAUGHS

AU NATUREL

"My girl always goes to bed in her working clothes."

"Howzat?"

"She's an artist's model."—Cannon Bawl.

THESE DAUGHTERS

She was only a tailor's daughter but she **sure** could cut up wild!—Black & Blue Jay.

OFTEN BETTER

A college man is as good a dresser as his roommate.—Oregon Orange Owl.

ENTERTAINING THE CUSTOMERS

"What are you doing now?"

"I'm in the real estate business."

"What line?"

"I play the trombone."—Carolina Buccaneer.

FASTENED IN

"Take that gum out of your mouth."

"I can't. My teeth would come with it."—Wisconsin Octopus.

NO DEAR—

No, dear, they do not raise chickens in the hatchway.—Northwestern Purple Parrot.

FAIRY TALE

Once upon a time there was a chop suey res—or is that a hotel lobby?—N. Y. Medley.

NEITHER—BOTH

A sorority house is a place where girls meet to powder their noses, smoke and discuss other girls—or is that a hotel lobby?—N. Y. Medley.

THIS HURTS

"Hear about Jack? Went out too far in the ocean and drowned."

"It surfs him right."—Pennsylvania Punch Bowl.

JUST TO BE SURE

Our idea of a skeptic is a man who sees twenty people waiting for the elevator and then **goes up** and pushes the button.—M. I. T. Voo Doo.

The Forger's Victim

"Right in here, miss."

The cabby held open the door, and looked out of his red eyes into a pretty feminine face—a young lady in traveling attire, who seemed a bit flustered with regard to the proper vehicle to take on this occasion.

I stood a little to one side, and in the rear of the cab, muffled in a great coat, watching furtively the pretty, anxious face of the jehu's expected passenger.

Somehow, I was strangely attracted by the face of that woman.

Why?

I was following the trail of a forger through England, a man who had more than once given officers the slip through his ingenious disguises and consummate coolness under difficulties.

Richard Trustnot was the man I sought. He was of medium height, compactly built, with light complexion and blue eyes, his age not far from thirty. He had been guilty of several forgeries, the last amounting to the neat sum of twenty thousand dollars.

The trusted clerk of a wealthy broker at Montreal, he fingered large sums of money at times. He had been with the broker several years, and his face was well known among the bankers and brokers of the city.

Not until this last transaction was it discovered that the confidential clerk had traded on his employers' name on more than one occasion in the past. His forgeries in all footed up the snug sum of sixty thousand dollars in round numbers.

His last haul had been a large one, and with the money he had skipped. Mr. Morton, the wronged broker, at once sent for me, and employed me to hunt down the villain who had so misused his confidence.

"I'd rather lose a hundred times twenty thousand than not to capture Dick Trustnot," asserted the broker, in hot language.

"Rest assured, if he lives he will be run to earth," was my reply, after which I left Mr. Morton to take the trail. It was to prove a longer one than I imagined when I first undertook the work. I am a determined man, however, and not daunted at difficulties, no matter how unexpected they may be.

I traced Trustnot from Montreal to Boston. Here I lost track of the villain, but believed he had taken passage on board of a steamer that left, two days before my arrival, for Liverpool. My task was perhaps less difficult than it would have been had I not known my man. I believed him to be unusually sharp, and realized that he must be in disguise, and under an assumed name, however, and my task would prove by no means an easy one.

Believing it would be useless to cable the authorities on the other side of the water, I did not do so, but took passage on the next steamer. Before going, however, I placed a competent detective on the lookout for my bird, who was to search American cities, and keep an eye out generally.

I was not certain that Trustnot had left America, although I felt reasonably sure that such was the case.

It was in London that I met with the incident that opens my story. It may seem strange that I should connect this flustered young lady with the forger, but when I inform the reader that the face of the girl was not new to me, that I had seen it once, at least, in Montreal, and that I held in my hand a little note dropped on the station platform not two minutes before by this same lady, the reader will not wonder at my suddenly aroused suspicions.

I had perused the note while passing out of the building. It contained but a few words:

"No. 47 Chester Square. Do not fail, if you wish to see me.

T."

The initial was the same as that of the man I sought; but who was the young lady, and what connection had she with the infamous forger? None, perhaps, but my suspicions were aroused, and I resolved to follow their lead until I verified or banished them entirely.

Immediately after the lady disappeared in the cab I hailed a passing driver and ordered him to drive quickly to Chester Square. I did not give any number, since it would not do to stop at the same place as the lady in question. I wished to follow her, and note who the person was she expected to meet.

Reaching the square, I dismissed the cab and moved along on foot. I saw nothing of the lady or the cab, but was not long in finding the desired number, a gray-stone front, with deep-set, narrow windows.

What next? It would not do to excite suspicion. Should I ring and boldly enter, asking to see a little lady in brown traveling costume?

No. That would never do.

I began pacing up and down before the house, pondering deeply, and wondering how the whole affair was likely to turn out.

Some ten minutes passed, and then the door opened and closed hastily, and a woman came out and stood on the walk. Her veil was down, and I could not see her face. Nevertheless, I at once recognized her as the lady who had dropped the note in the station. She glanced up and down the street, as if uncertain what course to pursue.

After a few moments the female walked up the street, crossed the square, and disappeared within one of the many houses. I at once followed, and paused in front of the spot—the narrow door through which the girl had just passed. Night shadows were now gathering, and the square was becoming gray in the gloom.

I was about to step to the door and ring, when a hand was laid on my shoulder and a gruff voice said:

"Don't make a noise. You must go with me."

I could see that I was in the hands of a police officer. I had been doing nothing out of the way, and had the badge of my own office with me. I protested.

"You'll find w'at you've done when you git to the station," growled the man, as he led me away.

"But I am an officer, like yourself."

It did no good to talk. I could not convince the stolid guardian of the peace that I was anything but a suspicious character, and not till our arrival at the police station was the truth discovered. I was finally released, but not until a late hour.

It seems that a complaint had been entered against one Harris for assault, and I had been arrested as the man. No one appeared against me; in fact, I was not the man wanted, as I soon satisfied the police captain, and so was dismissed, without receiving even an apology for the detention.

I at once made my way back to Chester Square. Lights were glowing but dimly through the fog that was settling over the city.

Once more I stood at the entrance to 47. No lights gleamed forth from the windows of the old stone building.

I was on the point of moving on, when the click of an opening door held my steps. What was my astonishment to see the door of 47 open and two forms come down the steps—a man and woman.

I at once subsided into a corner and watched the twain. The man was of medium size; the female, deeply veiled, resembled my fair traveler of the day very much.

"I put the fellow away for the night, Ora, so there'll be no danger of a sneaking spy on our movements during the rest of the night."

These words reached my ear and sent a thrill to my heart. So I had been purposely arrested, then? This man feared me, and had made the discovery that a detective was on his track. If not the man I sought, he was at least a criminal, and it was my duty to arrest him.

The two passed to the walk, and were soon whelmed in the fog, as they set out to cross the square I followed cautiously, and saw the man and woman disappear through the same door that the woman had entered earlier in the day.

Anxious not to lose sight of them, I quickly passed up the steps and tried the door. To my joy it opened to my touch, revealing a narrow stairway, up which I heard the sound of steps. I moved on in pursuit, one hand lying against the butt of a revolver. I resolved not to be caught napping.

Up one flight of stairs, down a narrow hall for a long distance, then the twain halted, and I heard a key grate in the lock.

A door was opened and closed. Again the grating of the key, and then I leaned against a locked door, shut out effectually from the twain whom I had so persistently followed.

Was I to be baffled now?

Quietly I knelt down and applied my eye to the keyhole. A light gleamed within, but the opening, partially filled by the key, was so small I was unable to distinguish objects only as they passed directly in front of the spot.

"Don't rebuke me, Richard—"

"Hist! Don't speak that name here. Even the walls have ears. I knew that man was an American that I sent to the station this night. He was dogging you, Ora, and but for my forethought we might be in an awful fix just now. You were a little simpleton to follow me, girl."

Something like a sob then fell on my ear.

"Oh, sir, don't accuse me. I—I could not live without you, Richard—"

"Have done with uttering that name, girl!"

"Oh, sir! Don't misunderstand me. I know all about the forgery, and—in spite of that I will become your wife. We can escape to the Continent and be happy there."

A sneering laugh followed from the man.

"Little simpleton! Did you think I meant to marry you, Ora Drifte? Bah! I was only playing with you. You're not the only woman I have loved, and——"

"Richard Trustnot," interrupted a quivering voice, "do you know what you are saying? This to the girl you wooed with passionate protestations of love? This marriage must take place! Do you understand?"

Although I could not see the girl's face, I could imagine the look of white terror that covered it. I could almost see the black sneer that curled the forger's lip as he said:

"No whining, Ora. I tell you, once for all, I will have nothing further to do with you. It was only a summer's amusement. I don't want you dogging my steps another day. If a detective is on my track, it is you who have sent him there."

"Oh, heavens!"

It was a pitiful wail, but it failed to touch the heart of the base deceiver. At length the woman's voice spoke again, and with an evident last appeal.

"Richard Trustnot, I remind you of the fact that you could not have escaped from America but for me. I assisted you in every way possible, and in the eyes of the law I am your partner in guilt."

"Sdeath!"

A thud followed.

"Take that, you whimpering jade! Follow me again, at your peril!"

My blood was on fire then, for I knew the villain had laid his hand in violence on the poor girl, whom I now remembered having seen once at the house of the old broker millionaire.

"Oh, Richard!"

An oath that was fiendish in its mockery of a woman's suffering followed the wail of despair.

"Come near me again, jade, and I will hand you over to the police. I've no patience with such as you. If you haven't any money, go to the almshouse or hospital. I wash my hands of you from this forth."

Then a key grated in the lock.

As the door swung open I rose to my feet with drawn revolver.

"Mr. Trustnot, I've got you now," I muttered grimly.

But I was mistaken.

Even as the door opened a lurid flash filled my eyes, followed by a stunning report, and Richard Trustnot, the forger, fell to the floor with a bullet in his brain. I stood there, in the glow of a lamp, confronting the murderess.

"Back!" she screamed, as I advanced a step into the room. "Don't attempt to arrest. It won't avail you."

I sprang quickly forward, but I was too late. A bullet went crashing through the breast of the girl, and she sank to the floor beside the man she had a moment before sent unshriven to meet his Maker.

No use for me to follow the trail further. It had come to a most tragic ending. I easily identified the dead forger. The police were soon in possession of the facts. I might have been detained on suspicion of murder but for the fact that Ora Drifte lived some hours after her awful work, and she exonerated me from all blame in the tragic affair.

CURRENT NEWS

ROOSTER ATTACKS MAN

A pugnacious rooster recently attacked Morris Breslow, a Hackensack newsdealer. He tried to shoo the rooster away but it pecked him on the leg. Now Breslow is in bed with an infected leg. A sharp pain on Monday revealed the wound. A suit for damages against the owner is threatened.

PREDICTION COMES TRUE

Henry Frost, former city official of Haverhill, Massachusetts, who told friends several years ago that he believed that, like his mother, he would die on his seventy-second birthday, was dead recently. His prediction came true. The end came after a two weeks' illness.

HIGH-GRADE NUT

Grafting a chestnut onto an oak tree has proved successful at Amador City, near Jackson, Calif. William J. Lane tried it a few years ago as an experiment and now the white oak is a perfectly good chestnut tree.

It has been bearing a high-grade nut for two years. Lane claims two advantages for grafting to the white oak—elimination of bitter skin usually found on the chestnut, and a hardy tree which will withstand the hardest winters. It is not affected by any kind of blight.

LONDON'S WATER BOARD ENFORCEMENT

Because they don't conform to the ideas of a couple of generations ago, many Londoners have received the surprising news that their domestic baths are illegal.

The modern tendency in designing baths is to have the inlet near the base, but the London Water Board is enforcing a regulation according to which only old pattern baths, with the faucet high above the water level, are legal. The rule was laid down by the metropolis water act in 1871.

HEATING OF HOMES BAD FOR HEALTH

Overheating of homes and offices tends to increase susceptibility to pneumonia, said Dr. C. E. A. Winslow, of Yale University, before the Institute of Hygiene at the University of Paris.

While pneumonia is much more common in the United States than in England, he said, England has much more bronchitis, which is particularly associated with too low a temperature. If American houses were kept at sixty-five degrees instead of seventy, and English houses at sixty-five instead of below sixty degrees, he suggested, there would be less pneumonia in America, and less bronchitis in England.

NEW COMET DISCOVERED

Discovery of a comet that can be seen with a small telescope was reported to the Harvard Observatory recently by Professor Frederick Slocum, of Wesleyan University, director of the Van Vleck Observatory at Middletown, Conn.

Professor Slocum, in a message to the observatory here, announced that the comet had been discovered by Professor Stearns on March 5. It is of the 10th magnitude and was observed near the star Beta, in the constellation Libra. The comet

has a daily motion of 15 seconds west and 19 minutes north.

The astronomical observation was given as right ascension 15 hours 16 minutes 6 seconds; declination, south 7 degrees 21 minutes 43 seconds.

NEEDLES FOUND IN MAN'S BODY

Pyongyang Hospital, maintained in the City of Pyongyang, Corea, by the Methodist Episcopal Church, is one of the few mission hospitals equipped with an X-ray machine. Dr. A. G. Anderson of Chicago, missionary superintendent of this Hospital, tells of some of its "revelations."

"I wish you could see some of the X-ray picture, one for example of a man whose abdomen has forty-three copper needles lodged in it, some of them buried in the spinal column itself, these needles vary in length from one-half inch to two and a half inches and are scattered all through the abdominal cavity.

"They were thrust through the abdominal wall, two or three at a sitting, over a period of four years. This was the treatment given by a Corean old-school doctor for indigestion."

NOSE GIVES WARNING OF FIRE

Damage amounting to about \$10,000 was done by a fire recently which destroyed the South China Restaurant in the basement of the building at the northeast corner of 66th Street and Columbus Avenue, New York City, which formerly housed Healy's famous Golden Glades Restaurant.

Discovery of the blaze was made by John Baker, a blind newsdealer, whose stand under the steps of the 66th Street elevated station adjoins the building. Baker smelled smoke and asked a passerby to investigate. Deputy Chief Dennis Curtin, who responded to the first alarm, sounded a second alarm when large quantities of smoke made entering the basement dangerous.

No damage was done to the Manhattan Billiard Parlor on the second floor of the building or to the Venetian Danceland dance hall on the third floor.

SKYSCRAPERS LIKE HUMAN BEINGS

Skyscrapers are like human beings, in the opinion of Senator Luigi Luiggi, famous Italian port engineer and professor of structural engineering at the University of Rome, who sailed on the N. G. I. liner Roma after making a study of America's tall buildings.

"I have studied the pyramids of Egypt," he said, but they are simply the creation of brute force. I have studied the works of the Greeks and Romans and the cathedrals of Europe. These show the highest achievement in art and science, but they are not alive. But when one sees an American skyscraper he feels that he is observing a living, being. The skeleton of steel, the flesh and muscles of stone, heat flowing like life-blood from the boilers which are the heart, and the intricate system of telephone wires, serving the part of nerves. So it is that your great architecture seems to me alive, while that of the ancients is dead."

TIMELY TOPICS

TIME SAVING DEVICE

W. E. Orcutt, principal of Central Junior High School in Marion, Ohio, is nothing if not efficient. Wearing by the necessity of running from room to room when he wanted to say something to teachers or pupils, he has had the entire building wired and equipped with loud speakers. Now each morning, he simply presses a button on his desk, every one "stands by" and one speech suffices for all.

FINDS SNAKES IN CABIN

When F. Cramer went to his ranch cabin in Sacramento, Calif., he looked in the door and then jumped out.

Cramer discovered a rattlesnake on the floor of the cabin and, after killing it, discovered twelve other snakes in the cabin.

As the snakes were torpid, he had no battle with them. The reptiles had evidently selected the cabin as a good place to rest during the Winter months.

RIDES 80 MILES ON MULE

"Uncle Green" Leatherwood, eighty, but hale and hearty, who came down out of the mountains with a saddle under his arm and lunch in his pocket, made it plain to inquiring persons that he was not in the market for an automobile, but sought to buy a mule.

He brought the saddle along because he wanted to ride the mule back home. He declared that the eighty-mile trip from Atlanta to his home aboard a "jar head" was just a little pleasure trip for him.

He got a mule and started out, declaring that he was going to teach the city mule how to plow "straight up and down."

ACTORS' PARADE

Moscow witnessed one of the strangest theatrical performances in history recently. Dressed in striped prison garb and shackled with chains and handcuffs, and with shaved heads, 300 actors paraded the streets of the capital guarded by Cosack prison warders carrying knouts and swords. The purpose of this grim procession was to show the present proletarian public how political offenders were punished in Czarist days and signalized the tenth anniversary of liberation from imperial jails of professional revolutionists. The entire company proceeded to the Meyerhold Theater, where they gave a drama based on prison life under the emperors.

FEMININE OUTFIT WEIGHS LESS THAN MALES

A recent complaint by manufacturers in London, England that business was poor because women were wearing so much less clothing led to investigations as to the truth of the insinuation. It has been found that the average weight of indoor clothing worn by Mayfair women is about fifteen ounces, while the complete outfit, including shoes and outdoor coat, tips the scales at three pounds four ounces.

Then somebody had the thought of performing a

similar test with the average well-dressed business man and discovered that he usually carts around twelve pounds eleven ounces of weight in raiment.

NOVELTY IN ART

Queen Mary has bought a picture by a young London artist, "Spaj" Atkinson, who, instead of using pigments, makes portraits with hundreds of gorgeously colored butterfly wings. Atkinson works under a great handicap owing to the loss of an eye, and he is also paralyzed in one leg and deaf. Despite the difficulties he is a cheerful and enthusiastic worker who has already won much commendation as an artist.

Apart from an occasional water color, all his pictures are fashioned of butterfly wings. Atkinson buys huge collections of butterflies. The pictures vary from five square inches to six feet high and the subjects are as wide in range as those of any oil painter. A large picture of Catherine of Aragon recently shown here contained more than 2,000 wings and took months to construct.

Among recent purchasers of his pictures are Princess Helena Victoria, Mrs. Stanley Baldwin, Viscountess Cave and the Marchioness of Cambridge.

NUMEROUS SIMEANS IN THIBET

Monkeys, gorillas and mandrills outnumber the human inhabitants of Thibet, says Col. Peter Kozloff, Russia's famous explorer who discovered the dead city of Kharakota in a recent expedition.

When the expedition first arrived in Thibet, Col. Kozloff said, tribesmen professed great friendship for its members, but after the Russians settled in their tents the Thibetans made a surprise attack on them in the middle of the night with 450 armed horsemen.

Kozloff's sentinel gave warning to the sleeping explorers just in time, and the Russians opened fire on the attackers, killing several. After a battle lasting an hour the tribesmen fled to the hills, but not before they captured most of the expeditions' rifles and ammunition.

"We traveled for weeks without seeing a single human being," Col. Kozloff said, adding that he had trained a large hideous but extraordinarily intelligent ape, making him a member of the expedition. Col. Kozloff said Thibet is covered with enormous yaks weighing 3,000 pounds whose skulls are so thick it is impossible to pierce them with ordinary bullets.

Col. Kozloff discovered in Kookoonor Lake a mysterious sacred island, the sole inhabitants of which are three Buddhist Monks, whose wild appearance, large frames, hairy bodies and enormous shaggy heads gave them the appearance of stone age men. They never before saw a civilized man and fled at the sight of Kozloff and his associates.

Kozloff announced that he intended this year to excavate a mysterious well in Thibet containing 240 carloads of rich treasures buried by the Kharakotans when the Chinese desolated their city.

PLUCK AND LUCK

— Latest Issues —

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